

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful!

# Shi'ite Beliefs in the Bible

## The London Lectures (2001-2002)

Thomas McElwain

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Puijonrinne 7  
70200 Kuopio, Finland

mingo@perlguy.net  
thomasgmcelwain@gmail.com  
[www.lulu.com/ThomasMcElwain](http://www.lulu.com/ThomasMcElwain)

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## Foreword

The world has become a village in terms of information about other faith traditions. It is no longer possible to ignore either the differences or the commonalities between religions. Now if ever is the time to look at the sources of various faiths from new perspectives in order to reaffirm one's own faith and perhaps to acquire valuable perceptions from others.

*London Lectures* is made up of studies presented to various groups in and about London in 2001 and 2002 when I was serving as coordinator of interfaith dialogue at the Islamic Centre of England. But they are hardly all in the spirit of interfaith dialogue as it is commonly understood. The audiences varied. Sometimes they were made up of Muslims, and sometimes included Christians, Jews, and Hindus as well. Despite the variety of occasions and purposes, there is a common thread going through all.

The major premise appears in the first lecture, *The Bible in a Nutshell*. This introduces the subject of all of the lectures, which is quite simply to evidence Islam on the basis of its written, historical roots in the Bible. The basics of Islam are dealt with in brief in several chapters. Others approach specific issues in more depth: the Biblical references to the name Muhammad, the name Ali, and the Biblical definition of the message of the Gospel. The results of these investigations have been overwhelmingly convincing to me as I have discovered them through personal search. The thoughtful reader may also find new avenues of revelation.

It is rare that Islamic apologetics is based entirely on its historical, pre-Qur'anic sources in the Bible. Clearly, Islam as we know it today in its various schools of jurisprudence is based on other sources, namely, the Qur'an, tradition, scholarly consensus, and either reason or comparison. The Bible is not one of the traditional sources of Islamic jurisprudence at all, and yet its historical importance cannot be denied, if only for the fact that it is so often mentioned in the holy Qur'an.

The question quite naturally arises, why appeal to the Bible. It is enough, one would think, that thousands of Jewish and Christian sects already do so. The answer is quite simple. The Qur'an commands the examination of the earlier Scriptures. Qur'an 10:94 "If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: The Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: So be in no wise of those in doubt." One reason for examining the Bible is to quell doubt about the things revealed to Muhammad, upon whom be peace. Those who wish to extend the invitation of Islam to Christians may also find Biblical evidence of value.

Muslim scholars are not strangers to the Bible. The Bible has been referred to as long as there has been Islamic scholarship, some, such as Ghazali, even producing extensive commentaries. In recent years it has become more popular for Muslim writers to take advantage of liberal scholarship in order to debunk the Bible and ostensibly Christianity at the same time. However, since the material for such exercises is taken from Christians themselves, it is hardly likely to convince Christians of the weakness of their premises. These studies lack that polemical point of departure, but result in sharper and more pointed evidence in favour of Islamic beliefs.

Religious faith is a delicate and often unreasonable thing. Various arguments are presented in this book for the purposes of awakening faith, arguments generally based on reason, systematic examination of the texts, and sometimes on rather sophisticated scholarship, as in Lecture Four: The Sacrifice of Abraham. But the subjects are presented in an easily accessible way with comprehensive material on many issues provided.

I hope that many readers will, no matter what conclusions they come to in the particular issues raised, gain a new awareness of the value of the Book of Revelation as a major source of faith and experience.

# Lecture One: The Bible in a Nutshell

The purpose of this lecture is to establish the fact that it is just as easy to prove Islam using a proof-text method of appeal to the Bible as it is to prove any of the forms of Christianity that use that method. It is not the intention to suggest that the proof-text method is sufficient or even valid. Before making a systematic review, it is necessary to note all convolutions. The desire to show to what extent the Bible is the common property of Middle Eastern religions, at least on some level, leads to the necessity of approaching the text from a proof-text point of view as well as from more sophisticated methods.

Before approaching the specifics, a pilot project that seeks to establish whether basic Islamic issues are to be found in the Bible is in order. If they cannot be found, then it is of no use to take the trouble of further examination. The specific issues chosen for this task are those fundamentals known in Shi'ite Islam as the roots of faith. We have already examined the Sunnite pillars of faith in some detail in another essay. Rather than going into such detail at this point for the roots according to Shi'ite Islam, we shall merely make a brief mention of each one. However, some of them are amplified by related issues that appear important because of Christian doctrine.

These roots of faith are five. The first is the oneness of God. This is amplified here by texts relating to the belief that God does not incarnate, that there is no salvation in the son of man, and that God is changeless. The second root of faith is the justice of God. The third root of faith is prophethood. This has already been examined in general in the light of many texts above, but here the particular reference to Muhammad is mentioned. This will form the focus of latter discussion as well. The principle of divine guidance is the fourth root. This is amplified by a Biblical reference to the word Ali. The final principle of faith is the Day of Judgment, which has also been dealt with in detail above, but is here amplified by its relationship to the gospel or message of Jesus (as).

I have given a transliteration of the proof-texts underlining the significant portions. This is especially necessary in the two or three cases in which I have radically disagreed with the commonly used translations.

There is only one God.

Psalms 86:10 (Hebrew) atta Elohim levaddekha. For you are great, and do wondrous things: you (Hebrew singular) are God alone.

Isaiah 45:5 (Hebrew) ani YHWH we-en 'odh zulathi en elohim: a-azerkha welo yedha'tani. I am the LORD, and there is no other, there is no God beside me; I girded you, though you have not known me.

That one God is just, and the only Saviour.

Isaiah 45:21 (Hebrew) Haggidhu wehaggishu af yiwwa'atzu yakhdaw: mi hishmia' zoth miqqedhem me-az higgidhah halo ani YHWH we-en odh elohim mibbal'adhi el tzaddiq umoshia' ayin zohathi. Tell it, and bring them near; indeed, let them take counsel together: who has declared this from ancient time? who has told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no other God beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.

God is not a man or the Son of man.

Numbers 23:19 (Hebrew) lo ish el wikhazzev uven adham weyithnetham: hahu amar welo ya'ase wedhibber welo yeqimenna. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: has he said so, and shall he not do so? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Notice that according to the text God is not a human being, not “the son of man,” not any “person” or “persons” at all, not one person nor three persons.

The Son of man cannot save you.

Psalms 146:3 (Hebrew) al tivtkhu vindhivim: beven adham she-en lo theshu'a. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

God does not change.

James 1:17 (Greek) pasa dosis agathe kai pan dorema teleion anothern estin katabainon apo tou patros ton foton par o ouk eni parallage e

tropes aposkiasma. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

If God does not change, as this Bible passage and several others maintain, then God does not incarnate, since incarnation requires change. God does not change into anything, not even a man.

God reveals His message to humankind through His servants the prophets.

Amos 3:7 (Hebrew) ki lo ya'ase adhonay YHWH davar ki im gala sodho el 'avdhaw hannevi-im. Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he will reveal his secret to his servants the prophets.

Many people will not believe the message of God through Muhammad (as).

Psalm 106:24 (Hebrew) wayyim-asu be-eretz Hamda: lo he-eminu lidhvaro. Indeed they despise the land of Muhammad, they do not believe his word.

The biased translator wishes to translate the name Muhammad, thus making “pleasant land” instead of “the land of Muhammad.” But this is not possible, because the sentence goes on to say “his word.” The possessive pronoun is masculine, showing Hamda to be a proper masculine name, rather than a feminine common noun as the ending might suggest. There are a number of such names in the Bible, feminine in form but masculine in meaning.

God made Abraham (as) a guide for all nations, in the following words spoken to him.

Genesis 12: 3 (Hebrew) wa-avarkha mevarakhekha umqallelkha a-or: wenivrekhu vekha kol mishpekhoth ha-adhama. And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Moses (as) prayed for a divinely appointed guide to come after him.

Numbers 27: 16 (Hebrew) Yifqodh YHWH Elohe harokhoth lekhol basar: ish 'al ha'edha. asher yetze lifnehem wa-asher yavo lifnehem



wa-asher yotzi-em wa-asher yevi-em: welo thiheye ‘adhath YHWH katz-tzon asher en lahem ro’e. Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, 17 Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

The principle of a divinely appointed leader goes back earlier than Moses (as), but here we see Moses (as) praying on behalf of one such figure.

Moses (as) invoked the name of Ali (as) in speaking to the Pharaoh.

Exodus 8:5(9) (Hebrew) wayyomer Moshe lefar’o hithpa-er ‘Ali lemathay a’tir lekha wela’avadhekha ul’ammekha lehakhrith hatzfarde’immimekha umibbattekha raq baye-or tish-sha-arna. And Moses said to Pharaoh, Glorify Ali: when shall I intreat for you, and for your servants, and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses, that they may remain in the river only?

The translation which says “Glory over me” simply does not make sense.

The people of Israel sang about Ali (as) as they walked in the wilderness.

Numbers 21:17 (Hebrew) az yashir yisra-el eth hash-shira hazzoth ‘Ali ve-er ‘enu lah. Then Israel sang this song, Ali (the Exalted one) is a well (of water); sing to it.

The translation that says “Rise up, O well” only fits a surrealistic painting. In reality, wells do not fly.

David (as) prophesied the coming of Islam.

Psalms 29:11 YHWH ‘oz le’ammo yitten: YHWH yevarekh eth ‘ammo vash-shalom. The LORD will give strength to his people; the LORD will bless his people with Islam.

The word Islam is cognate with the Hebrew word for “peace.” It is the proclamation of reconciliation and peace, not only between God and humankind, but between one nation and another, one family and another, one individual and another. It also reconciles the opposing “parts” into which humankind would divide the impartial

God into the one true God without parts and without limitations. Islam, meaning peace, is peace in every possible sense.

God will forgive those who pray towards His house, according to the petition of Solomon (as).

1 Kings 8:30 (Hebrew) weshama'ta el tekhinnath 'avdekha we'ammekha yisra-el asher yithfallu el hammaqom hazze: we-atta tishma' el meqom shivtekha el hash-shamayim weshama'ta wesalakheta. And listen to the supplication of your servant, and of your people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear in heaven your dwelling place: and when you hear, forgive.

Forgiveness depends on the grace of the one true God alone, with nothing added, no sacrifice human or otherwise. It is offered to those who turn in prostration toward Him, repenting and asking forgiveness.

God will take vengeance on the wicked and reward His worshippers on the day of judgement, as He promised Moses (as).

Deuteronomy 32:41-43 (Hebrew) im shannothei beraq kharbi wethokhez bemishpot yadhi: ashiv naqam letzaray we limsan-ay ashellem. ashkir khitz-tzay middam wekharbi tokhal basar: middam khalal weshivya merosh par'oth oyev. harninu ghoyim 'ammo ki dham 'avadhaw yiqqom: wenaqam yashiv le'atzaw wekhifer adhamatho 'ammo. 41 If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. 42 I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. 43 Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

Of nearly one hundred texts mentioning the Gospel, only one actually tells us what the message of the Gospel contains, the Gospel in a nutshell.

Revelation 14:6-7 (Greek) kai eidon angelon petomenon en mesuranemati ekhonta evangelion aionion evangelisai tus kathemenus

epi tes ges kai epi pan ethnos kai fylen kai glossan kai laon: legon en fone megale fobithete ton theon kai dote avto doksan oti elthen e ora tes kriseos avtu kai proskynesate to poiesanti ton uranon kai ten gen kai ten thalassan kai pegas ydaton. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

The Gospel in a nutshell is three commands: Fear God (that is, do as God commands instead of conforming to what the neighbour thinks), glorify God (that is, recognize God alone as the source of all good things and give thanks to Him), and pray to Him in prostration. The Gospel gives two explanations for these commands: everyone is going to be held accountable to God in the judgement, and God is deserving of worship and obedience because He is the Creator of all things.

Obviously it is necessary to go beyond a mere proof-text method. However, the experiment of proof-texting shows that Islam is clearly as capable of being established on the basis of proof texts as any tradition that has ever appealed to Bible texts as evidence of its system of doctrine and practice.

## Lecture Two: The Fragrance of Islam

Islam and Christianity have had a mottled history of confrontation. They are sister faiths having roots in Middle Eastern monotheism and still have a great deal in common. Yet they have been pitted against each other throughout the history of Islam since the appearance of the prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace) in the beginning of the seventh century CE. The two faiths have been associated with opposing cultural, social and political systems for over fourteen hundred years, and yet Muslims and Christians have had enormous influences one on the other.

Although Islam can be more truthfully said to have been spread by the caravan than by the sword, neither faith has been a stranger to violence. Yet the word Islam comes from the same root as peace. Surely anyone claiming to be a Muslim who does not foster peace is making a false claim. Much has been made of violent acts in recent times, but it should be remembered that all of these are in the context of quarrels among wealthy oil families, both Western and Middle Eastern. At times they are able to agree, despite their differences of religion, and when they do not, religion is only a pretext. Christianity and Islam share a belief in a figure known to the former as antichrist and to the latter as dajjal. In Islamic belief, this figure has only one eye. Those who have only one eye, an eye for oil, and no eye for social justice, morality and ethics other than to appeal to them as a pretext for their own agenda, surely betray both Islam and Christianity.

The incident of the woman anointing the feet of Jesus (as) with fine perfume brings to mind a certain tradition often quoted by orientalist. It is said that the Prophet (as) once said that he had loved women, and that he had loved sweet odours, but that the solace of his soul had been prayer. It is my purpose to open a few of the perfume bottles of Islam from the Christian Scriptures themselves, so that the Christian can enjoy both the savour of Christ who accepted the sinful woman and her gift as well as the faith of the last of the prophets. At the same time, it should be remembered that Islam is not based on the Bible, but on the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the prophet and his family (as).

## Tawheed or the Unity of God

“Say, He, God, is one (alone). God, the needless, He does not beget nor is He begotten, and there is none like Him, no not one.” Qur’an 112. This text is used by millions of Muslims daily as a part of their prayers. It expresses the first and foremost principle of Islam, the unity and uniqueness of God. In this matter, Islam contrasts with Christianity, which acknowledges a trinity, or one god in three persons.

We find the Christian Scriptures wholly agreeing with this basic Islamic principle of faith. In Deuteronomy 32:39 we find God Himself speaking “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.” In his prayer Nehemiah (9:6) confessed “Thou, even thou, art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” Jesus agrees that this is the first principle of faith when he says in Mark 12:29 “The first of all the commandments is Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.” St. Paul, apostle beloved of Christians says in 1 Corinthians 8:6 “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things.”

## The Justice of God

The second great principle of Islamic faith is the assurance that God is not arbitrary, but essentially just. The justice of God is expressed in Qur’an 3:17 “God (Himself) witnesses that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, standing firm for justice, (there is) no god but He, the Mighty the Wise.” The same great attribute is mentioned many times in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 32:4 we read “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

Muslims understand that God’s justice is essential and intrinsic. Justice is not a separable attribute, nor even a part of God, but God’s very being. The unity of God implies to the Muslim that God has no limits nor parts. Having no limits, there is no limit to God’s perception and knowledge. Having no parts, God must be

impartial. The unity of God implies His intrinsic justice. He has all knowledge of every situation, and being impartial, He is perfectly just.

## The Apostleship

The third great principle of Islamic faith is apostleship. This is expressed in the holy Qur'an 10:47. "And for every people (was sent) an apostle; and when came their apostle, the matter between them was decided with equity and they shall not (in the least) be done (any) injustice." This text of the Qur'an notes that the justice of God requires Him to reveal His will to all humankind. Therefore He has sent prophets to all nations. Islam requires belief in all true prophets, both the prophet mentioned in the Bible and those mentioned in the Qur'an. Muhammad (as) is the last of the prophets sent by God. Thus Qur'an 33:40 says "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but an Apostle of God and the last of the prophets: And God is of all things ever the Knower."

In the Christian Scriptures we find the same principles. In Amos 3:7 it says "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." The question arises whether or not Muhammad (as) is mentioned in the Bible. Many texts might be applied to him, but several mention him by name. One of the most important of these is Psalm 106:24, which says "They despise the land of Muhammad (Hebrew Hamda), they believe not his word." This is a Biblical prophecy indicating that when Muhammad (as) should come, many would find an excuse not to believe in him because of his country of origin. Indeed, we find this to be the case.

## Divine Guidance

The fourth great principle of Islamic faith is divine guidance. It is also a logical deduction from the principle of the unity of God. The unity of God implies His justice. God's justice implies verbal revelation of His will, otherwise He would be unjust in holding people accountable for their actions. But verbal revelation, the word of the prophets, implies further guidance, guidance in action, guidance in flesh and blood. A good illustration of this is an assembly kit. When you buy something that needs to be assembled, there is always a printed instruction

manual. Most of us have experienced how confusing such manuals can be. If there is someone who has done it before to show us how, we find the task much easier. The divine guide is one appointed by God to show us how to implement the revealed will of God.

In any practical situation, there are matters about which we might have questions that recourse to the Scriptures is insufficient. Even after reading the Bible and the Qur'an, we are unsure what to do. The role of the divine guide is to show us what to do. The Arabic word for the divine guide is Imam, although this is often used merely to refer to a simple leader of prayer. The word leader in referring to the divine guide is much more than that, however. The holy Qur'an mentions that God made Abraham (as) not only a prophet, but a leader or Imam for humankind, in Qur'an 2:125 "And remember when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words then he fulfilled them: He said, Truly I make you an Imam for humankind..."

The principle of divine guidance runs like a golden thread throughout the Christian Scriptures as well. The necessity of divine guidance is expressed very neatly in the story of Philip in Acts 8:30-31 "Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?" The statement of the Ethiopian shows clearly that the writings of the prophets are not enough. There must also be a divine guide to implement them in practice.

The leadership of Abraham (as) continued through his descendants, finally coming to the holy Prophet Muhammad (as), who passed it on to his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn abi Taleb (as). This was done publicly after the event of the Prophet's (as) last pilgrimage to Mecca. The greater portion of the Muslims at the time were witnesses to the fact. At that time Ali (as) was appointed, and the appointment has gone down to eleven of his descendants, the last of which is believed to be still living and ruling. The Bible also shows a number of series of twelve leaders, such as the twelve patriarchal reigns in Genesis, the twelve sons of Ishmael, the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve judges of Israel, the twelve righteous kings of Judah, and the twelve disciples of Christ (as).

The Day of Judgement

The differences between the Islamic and Christian concepts of the Day of Judgement are difficult to find, and hardly to be understood by any but the specialist, so close are the two faiths in this regard. This is the final great principle of Islamic faith, and it is mentioned in many passages of the holy Qur'an, such as 99:6-8 "On that day people will come out (from their graves) in (scattered) groups, to be shown their own deeds. Then he who has done an atom-weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom-weight of evil shall see it." Jesus makes the same point in Matthew 12:36 "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement."

Thus there are five great principles of Islam. The unity of God implies His justice. The justice of God implies the necessity of revelation. Revelation implies someone to implement it. Finally, human beings are held responsible for how they relate to the revelation of God's will. Besides the five great principles of Islamic faith there are many practices that logically proceed from them, as well as being expressed in revelation. Ten of these are traditionally considered to be basic. These are daily prayer in prostration, fasting during the month of Ramadhan, pilgrimage to the house of God in Mecca, charity taken from one's assets, charity taken from one's profits, jihad or endeavour in the way of God, enjoining good, opposing evil, respect for godly people, and avoidance of wicked people.

### Prayer in Prostration

Muslims are known particularly for their daily prayer in prostration. Therefore the holy Qur'an (6:163) states "Say: Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death, (are all only) for God, the Lord of the worlds." Actually Islamic prayer is better described in the Bible than in the Qur'an. Every time and gesture of Islamic prayer in prostration is mentioned in the Bible. Nearly every common phrase of the prayer is to be found in the Psalms of David. It is one of the incongruities of reality that Muslims follow the Bible so closely in their prayer, while Christians and Jews have developed extra-Biblical practices of prayer. Yet the latter claim to base their practice on the Bible, whereas Muslims do not. Muslims base their practice on the



Qur'an and tradition. If anything can be said about humankind, it is that we are irrational.

The example of Jesus praying in prostration is mentioned in Matthew 26:39 "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed." Prayer at specific times in the day is also mentioned in the Bible, Psalm 32:6 "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." Also Psalm 69:13 "But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time." The cry "Allahu akbar" is mentioned as belonging to prayer in Psalm 35:27; 18:5,6; 30:8; 34:3; and 55:16. Standing, bowing, kneeling, and prostrating are all gestures of prayer in the Psalms. Prayer towards the house of God is commended in Psalm 5:7 "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

Islamic prayer brings the individual into paradise itself. When I began dialogue with Muslims, one of the first things I was told was "If you only knew how sweet is prayer in prostration, you would fight us to get it." That is entirely true.

## Fasting

In Qur'an 2:183 it says "O you who believe! Fasting has been ordained to you as it was ordained to those before you so that you might guard yourself (against evil)." Interestingly enough, fasting is not mentioned in the books of Moses (as) except for the forty day fast of Moses (as) himself. A similar fast was performed by Jesus (as) upon receiving the Gospel, and by Muhammad (as) as well. Yet we know that fasting in the ninth lunar month, the month of Ramadhan, was practiced from early times, as the Qur'an indicates. Evidence of this is in Jeremiah 36:9 "And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem." We know that this was a common religious practice from the fact that this king was not a righteous one. He did not proclaim anything good unless it was an established practice.

The reason for fasting is to help us to guard ourselves against evil. That is, it fosters doing the right thing. It makes us stop to

reevaluate our lives and redetermine to act in ethical, moral, and just ways.

## Pilgrimage

It is incumbent on every Muslim to go to the house of God in Mecca at least once in a lifetime if possible. It says in the Qur'an (22:27) "And proclaim to the people the Pilgrimage! They will come to you on foot and on lean camel, coming from every remote (high) way."

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem is mentioned often in the Gospel in relation to Jesus (as). But Jesus (as) prophesies in John 4:21 that the time will come "when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Muslims believe that the Pilgrimage to Mecca refers back to the experience of Abraham, who rebuilt the house of God there, making it a holy place down to our days as well. At the beginning of his ministry, Muhammad (as) continued the direction of prayer towards Jerusalem. It was only later that the prophecy of Jesus (as) was fulfilled, and Mecca rather than Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem, became the proper place of pilgrimage and the right direction of prayer.

## Charity

Charity is enjoined on Muslims in the holy Qur'an 2:43 "Establish the prayer and give away the poor-rate and bow down (praying)." In the sermon on the mount Jesus (as) begins Matthew six with four verses enjoining charity. Charity has always been a primary Christian duty, and in this the two faiths of Islam and Christianity are very much agreed. In some sense we can take Matthew six as a summary of the teaching of Jesus (as). In Matthew five Jesus merely establishes his adherence to the law. In Matthew seven he describes the day of judgement. The meat of this sandwich is Matthew six, and the first principle of Matthew six is alms in charity. It is interesting to note that the rest of the chapter deals with prayer in prostration, fasting, and, in the last half, probably with pilgrimage.

## Holy War

There are four kinds of holy war in Islam: striving with the self, striving with one's wealth, striving with knowledge, and striving with the sword. These may well be in order of importance, the last being the least. Therefore the Qur'an (9:41) says "Go forth (with) light and heavy equipment and strive in the way of God with your property and your selves, this is better for you, if you knew (it)."

Thus the principle of Islam is to struggle or strive, first of all with oneself to maintain right, then with one's wealth, intellectual capacity, and arms. Islam is not a pacifist religion, but military action is carefully circumscribed. Unfortunately most of the military action down through history has not been justifiable on Islamic principles. War to enhance territory and wealth is not justifiable, and this is the general situation. "Jihad should be exclusively in the way of the Lord and never for any territorial ambition." (Introduction to the Holy Qur'an, S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali, page 123a).

Recent research suggests that Jesus (as) was not the sweet and effeminate saviour that many believe him to be, but a Zealot, establishing himself as the divinely appointed leader in the face of the Roman occupation. Whether or not that be the case, Christianity was spread throughout Europe by the sword and later throughout the world through colonial occupation. The greatest holocaust, insofar as the numbers of victims is concerned, was not the Jews in Europe in the 1940s, but the Indians in Mexico, of whom more than twice as many died in only half the time, during the first few years of Christian conquest, many of them being baptized against their will before being killed.

Islam is the faith of peace, and Muslims should invite Christians to join them in walking the middle line, not declining war when it is necessary to defend peace and justice, but fearlessly condemning the terrorism, violence, and oppression that is so visible in the present world as a result of politico-economic conflict.

## Enjoining the good and opposing evil

This practice of Islam is expressed in the holy Qur'an 3:109 "You are the best group that has been brought forth for mankind: you enjoin goodness and you forbid evil, and you believe in God; and if the

people of the Book had (also) believed (similarly) it had surely been better for them; of them (only some) are believers and most of them are perverse.”

The same principle is reiterated in Psalm 45:7 “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” It is said that all are responsible to foster good and oppose evil to the best of their ability, if not by actions, then by words, and if not by words, then by thoughts. According to Islam good is whatever is in accordance with revealed divine law, and evil is anything that opposes it.

### Respect for the godly and avoidance of the wicked

This Islamic principle is mentioned in the holy Qur'an 42:23 “That is of which God gives the glad tidings to His servants who believe and do good deeds; Say: I demand not of you any recompense for it (the toils of apostleship) but the love of (my) relatives, and whosoever earns good, We increase for him good therein, truly God is Oft-Forgiving the most Grateful (One).” Attachment to the godly refers to two groups: firstly to the worthy descendants of the Prophet (as) and specifically the divinely appointed guides, and secondly to those who earn good, or by their behaviour show their attachment to the will of God.

The same principle is found in the Bible as well, for example, in Malachi 3:18 “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” The idea is to put a distinction between those who do right and those who do not. This is the basic criterion of distinguishing between people, and it implies that other criteria are wrong. Thus we should not distinguish between people on the basis of their wealth, race, appearance, or mental or physical capacity. We should respect people uniquely for the degree to which they show evidence of adherence to divine law and foster it. Attraction to celebrities is thus un-Islamic.

Down through the centuries Islam has been taught with the fingers of the hand, to make things simple and easy to remember. There are five basic principles and ten basic practices. These constitute the basics of Islam, but there are many other matters of grave

importance, such as the many practices of purity, modesty, and justice. But these are all implicit in the one great principle that God is one.

# Lecture Three: The Family of Abraham (as): A Social, Economic, Political and Religious Model

## 1. Definitions and Goals.

The study to follow is based on the story of the family of Abraham (as) as described in the Biblical passage of Genesis 12-22. It is an uncritical contemplation of the Massoretic text of the Genesis story in the Bible as it stands in the Hebrew. The question I pose is not how the original narrator understood the matter of the family. Rather, I pose the question of how a historically significant text, one attached to several great religious traditions over more than a thousand years, can be understood in the light of the family values of one of those traditions. This purpose would be gainsaid by appealing to historical criticism, since it is the text as it stands, rather than its sources, which is of relevance to the questions posed. Systematic investigation can be applied within those parameters, and that is the purpose of the following essay.

After presenting the problem, the methodology will be simply to approach the texts using the word family to see what narrations and actions impinge on its use in the text of Genesis. To that extent analysis cannot differ from one observer to another. I have divided this into two parts. The first is a general overview of the use of the word family in the whole body of the Hebrew Bible. The second is a more specific investigation of each passage in the story of Abraham in which the basic social elements of the family are prominent. I shall go beyond this, however, to point out similarities and parallels with Islamic values. From a scholarly point of view such parallels are either fortuitous, or merely reflect the fact that Islam shares to some extent a common geographical and cultural ethos with the Genesis record.

The family is the central subject of the two positive commands in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17). The Sabbath commandment limits the authority of the parents on children, on workers, and on domestic

animals. The following commandment requires children to honour their parents. These two commands, according to the Decalogue, comprise the whole positive duty of humankind. The importance of the family is thus not only central but vital.

The very first command of the Bible is in Genesis 1:28 “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The command to reproduce according to this passage is half of the duty of humankind, the other half being to have dominion. The family is the centre of human responsibility before God.

The word generally translated family in Hebrew is *mishpekhah*, but occurs for the first time in Genesis 8:19, where it is translated “kinds.” “Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.”

The translator is obviously ill at ease with the word family as applied to animals. However, this is the first and defining occurrence of the word in the Scriptural canon. The context gives two distinct connotations of the word. The first relates to the pair of unclean animals taken into the ark, and the second relates to the group of seven clean animals taken into the ark at the beginning of the flood. These two groups have potentially changed during the time in the ark, and these changes have turned them into “families.” The first change relates clearly to both groups, and this is reproduction. Both groups have become families through reproduction, and the addition of offspring is a binding and defining feature of the family. The second group, that of seven clean animals, adds another feature besides descent in defining the family. This is the feature of flocking, or cooperative life. These two features overlap and define the family as a group of relatives who live in proximity and are mutually dependent on each other for a livelihood.

The use made of the word *mishpekhah* in Jeremiah 15:3, where it is translated “kinds,” is a single and unusual case. There even the sword is in a particular kind or family.

The next occurrence of the word *mishpekhah* is in Genesis 10:5, and is even more illuminating as a defining text. “From these were parceled out the areas of the peoples in their lands, each according to his language; according to their families in their peoples.” This is the first

text where the word family is applied to human beings. The context defines the political and social geography of the whole world. The implied concept of family thus pretends to be universal and normative. The text is most interesting in its implications. It makes a common language the defining feature for ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have defined areas of residence. Finally, the ethnic group consists of smaller units, which are called families. These families are logically defined by Genesis 8 as biologically related people living in proximity and dependent on one another for their livelihood.

What is outstanding here is that no other social or political groupings are acknowledged in the whole world. There are only ethnic groups defined, not by political features, but by residence and language. There is no implication of further cooperation within the ethnic group as a whole. The real social, political, and economic unit is the extended family. This textual intent could be either descriptive or proscriptive, but the context of Genesis 10 would imply very strongly that it is proscriptive. It remains to be seen how and to what extent this may be modified.

The other texts which affirm this concept of the family are Genesis 10:18, et al. 24:38, et al. 36:40; Exodus 6:14, et al. Numbers 1:2, et al. 3:15, et al. 4:2, et al. 11:10; 26:5, et al. 27:1, et al. 33:54; 36:1; Deuteronomy 29:18(17); Joshua 6:23; 7:17; 13:15, et al. 15:1, et al. 16:5, et al. 17:2; 18:11, et al. 19:1, et al. 21:4, et al. Judges 1:25; 9:1; 1Samuel 9:21; 10:21; 18:18; 20:6, 29; 2Samuel 14:7; 16:5; Jeremiah 1:15; 2:4; 3:14; Amos 3:2; Nahum 3:4; Zechariah 12:12, et al. 14:7; Psalm 22:27(28); 96:7; Job 31:34; 32:2; Ruth 2:1, et al. Nehemiah 4:13(7); Esther 9:28; 1Chronicles 2:53, et al. 4:2, et al. 5:7; 5:19(4) et al. 7:5; 16:28.

Since the family has such an important defining role in Scripture, it is therefore of prime importance to take note of divine guidance in regard to the family. Much of revelation deals with one or another aspect of the family, so that it is impossible to deal with all of it in one study. Nevertheless, the main features become apparent as we contemplate the life of one individual who has been for thousands of years the model of virtue for all people. The Biblical prophet says in Isaiah 51:2 "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." We are always justified in beginning with the example of Abraham (as), for God says in Qur'an 2:124 "And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will



make thee an Imam to the nations." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evildoers." And further in Qur'an 2:130 "And who turns away from the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? Him We chose and rendered pure in this world: And he will be in the Hereafter in the ranks of the Righteous."

I have therefore chosen to examine some salient features of the main passages relating to the family of Abraham (as) as the story appears in Genesis 12 to 22. I take the passages in order of appearance, and attempt to investigate them systematically. Beyond that, however, I have addressed the text with certain questions in mind, which are reflected in the various sections of the study below. For the purposes of this study, I have accepted the Biblical text as it reads in the Massoretic Hebrew version without reference to textual criticism.

## 2. A blessing for all families of the earth

Genesis 12:1 "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

This text establishes the principles of true faith, but beyond this it also establishes the family as the basic social unit of existence. It does not recognise political entities as such, but only the authority of the divinely appointed ruler in Abraham (as) on one hand, and all the families of the earth on the other. The act of blessing Abraham (as), and consequently his divinely appointed descendants serving as prophets and guides, implies the duty of submission to their authority. All families are thus directly under the authority of Abraham (as) or his duly commissioned successor to authority.

The social implications of this passage are enormous. The authority and submission reigning between all families and the divinely appointed ruler ignores to extinction all other attempts to control society. It undercuts the validity of all forms of government. It opposes all seemingly natural social forces with a particular institutional control. Finally, it raises the family as the only visible institution with divine approval, an institution placed directly under the

control of Abraham (as) and his successors. This great fact in practice means that care must be taken to walk the narrow line between the social, political, economic and religious forces which would annihilate the family by usurping the proper bases of sovereignty.

### 3. Taqiyya: preserving the family from the evils of society.

Genesis 12:10 “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: 12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.”

Preserving the right relationship between the family and divine authority sometimes requires careful planning in how to relate to human authorities. The story of Abraham (as) instructing his wife to engage in taqiyya or dissembling is the model of reference for such situations. It logically implies a number of things. It is necessary to foresee the areas of conflict between divine law and human institutions. It is furthermore necessary to form strategies for avoiding such conflict insofar as possible. Such strategies must place adherence to divine law above openness to usurping authorities. The result may be taqiyya, that is, dissembling the truth before officials when it is necessary to do so to avoid compromising divine law.

Such a scenario is of course an extreme case. In most situations strategies can and must be formed which permit an open relationship to non-Islamic government and society on one hand, while providing for a family life within the parameters of divine law on the other.

### 4. Compromise: preserving peace within the family.

Genesis 13:8 “And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand,

then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

The experience of Abraham (as) reported here notes that he was willing to suffer financial loss or at least compromise his potential for profit in order to keep peace within the family. The story indicates that he gave Lot (as) the first choice for pasturage, and was left with the least fertile areas.

The relevance of this matter goes far beyond the quality of family life as such to a well-defined socio-economic policy. The logical implication of this episode in the life of Abraham (as) is that profits must be insinuated into the family context. The family as the basic social unit is also the basic economic unit. Business which is divorced from the family situation does not have a valid basis, and the concept of a professional life which ignores the ramifications of the extended family is a non-scriptural idea. The purpose of attaining wealth must be the maintenance and enhancing of the family and its welfare, not the enhancement of a personal career. As we compare this to the economic trends in recent decades, it appears that the acquisition of wealth has largely been deflected from the family to broader social and political arenas on one hand, and to personal and individualistic goals on the other. This tendency is highly questionable in principle, and in practice appears to have weakened the role of the family. It has also created an artificial problem of such magnitude that many are unable to see any alternative structures, and this is the problem of the individual and society. A return to a Scriptural notion of the family as the central element of society would not merely give answers to such issues, but annihilate the very perceptual cadre which has produced them.

The family is made up not only of parents and small children, but of a wider lineage of adults. The modern trend towards ignoring these ties in business and professional life has clearly resulted in the breakdown of both the wider family and the relations between parents and dependent children. The purpose of this breakdown, if it is a purposeful phenomenon, is to facilitate invalid controls, both governmental and industrial, within society. The result of the implementation of such invalid controls exacerbates the tension between individual and society and thus creates a vicious circle.

A correction of this breakdown of the family will often entail compromise of the potential for profit. Only a clear understanding of this can facilitate its implementation. Although there will immediately

arise on the part of the Westerner the criticism that nepotism is unjust, the principle remains. A brother or cousin is a preferable business partner than a stranger. This strengthens the family and weakens illicit forces.

This is perhaps one of the Scriptural, Islamic values most neglected by Muslim immigrants in the West. Despite the fact that the rush to earn is often accompanied by a very real economic support of the extended family remaining in the home country, there is evidence that individualistic professional values acquired in the West are eroding both the awareness of the Islamic principles involved and the will to incorporate the extending family in one's economy. This is only natural, since it is an unbalanced situation which places the economic burden on one or a limited number of individuals. The immigrant situation is intrinsically harmful to the family, and unless conscious measures are taken to counteract this evil, it will eventually result in the loss of other spiritual values.

## 5. Reproduction: a central reason for living in families.

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

The fundamental concern of Abraham (as) as he appears in the Genesis story is his desire to have children. This overrides all other interests. His interest is not informed by a personal idiosyncrasy, but by the divine will itself. It is thus normative. Taking the Abrahamic example, we should be more interested in making heirs than we are in providing inheritance. Another clear contrast with the values of the present world we live in arises here. The family is the only existing regenerative source of society. The importance of propagation in the mind of both Abraham (as) and his wife is such that they are willing to compromise the peace of the family in order to accomplish it. Polygamy in the Bible is first noted in an unrighteous society (Genesis 4:23). The first model of marriage is monogamous (Genesis 2:23,24). Nor is there a command in Genesis to engage in polygamy. However, the polygamy of Abraham (as) is not stated to be outside the divine will, and it never required repentance or atonement. It resulted in the

divinely willed birth of Ishmael (as), although it also resulted in a disruption of family peace.

Polygamy was practiced by many of the righteous examples of the Bible, and although it is the object of limiting legislation, it was never forbidden. The holy Qur'an limits the number of wives to four, but under very severe restrictions. In view of all of the circumstances, there is no evidence that we are justified in suggesting that Abraham (as) made a mistake in taking a second wife. The birth of Ishmael (as) is clearly planned and desired by both God and Abraham (as), to say nothing of Abraham's first wife, Sarah, as reported in Genesis.

The lesson to be learned from this is not freely to engage in polygamy, but to realise to what extent reproduction is important to human society. We have only to refer to the text in Genesis 1 quoted above to remind ourselves that reproduction is half of the whole positive duty of humankind.

The question of polygamy is one of the most burning issues in the dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It must be kept foremost in mind that the Bible and the Qur'an are in clear agreement on this matter. The ideal is monogamous marriage, but polygamy within certain constraints is not forbidden, and serves some very pragmatic needs. Christianity in forbidding polygamy outright and absolutely, besides going beyond the Scriptural limits, has not been able to produce an example of a society where the ideal of monogamous marriage is thereby maintained in all its glory. On the contrary, Christian societies have always been characterised by sexual excesses and social scandal. In Islamic societies a reluctant loosening of the constraint of absolute monogamy may have raised the status of women to some extent from the horrors of prostitution, but unfortunately other social and economic factors have often in practice mitigated the gains. Had Islam spread among less patriarchal peoples, its ideals might have shown more successful examples in this matter.

From a purely logical point of view, given the command of Genesis 1, every normal, healthy individual should have the right if not the obligation to marry and reproduce. In a society where there is a specific percentage of more women than men, there should be an equal percentage of occurrences of polygamy. However, where this is the case, the preponderance of additional women generally occurs at a higher age. Correspondingly, to be logical, the second wife should be noticeably older rather than younger. This might not always serve the purpose of propagation, but it would serve the purpose of women's

right to marry. Having said that, it is necessary to note that according to the Biblical narrative polygamy in the case of Abraham was only tolerated as long as Sarah, the first wife, tolerated it. Social issues aside, the choice devolves on those involved, not on outsiders. Even under legal pressure to accept a polygamous relationship, the Bible recognizes the right of the individual to refuse it, as in the case of the other redeemer of Ruth (Ruth 4:6). Personal interests, specifically the desire to maintain a monogamous family, may thus override polygamy even in the limited cases in which polygamy in the levirate is prescribed by the Torah. Much could be said about the issue from the individual and psychological point of view, and the evils of polygamy are obvious to everyone. But in terms of society as a whole, the institution of polygamy is one of two alternatives. Either polygamy must be accepted to a limited extent, or the institution of celibate monasticism. If all men married, the need for polygamy would be greatly reduced, if only by the fact that fewer women would be available.

The present Western standard of a growing singles society is completely unacceptable if for only one reason. Social and political control of a society of singles is easier than that of families. Those who have children naturally engage themselves in influencing society in favour of their children's safety and well-being. Those who do not have children are oftentimes more inert in opposing oppression in the areas relating to education and the development of children. While singles may be very active, even more active than married people, in some social issues, their attention is more immediate, and the long-term direction of social development, which depends on children, is neglected. The tendency in the West is toward inhuman totalitarianism hidden beneath a plethora of immediate issues in crises. One of the best ways of reversing that would be a social movement toward marital commitment and the founding of families, even in some situations including polygamy.

## 6. Circumcision: defining social boundaries.

Genesis 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.  
10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

At the time of the coming of the Gospel, Judaism was split on the question of whether a convert or proselyte was required to be circumcised. This same question continued to split the community of the followers of Jesus (as). The writings of St. Paul reflect that local situation in many vehement expressions condemning the circumcision of adult proselytes. The question of the circumcision of male children, however, is never discussed in the New Testament epistles. The practice of the circumcision of children remains valid and normative from its institution in the family of Abraham (as) down to the present day.

Circumcision was given to Abraham (as) as a sign of his faithfulness in obedience to God. It was to be an identifying mark through succeeding generations. The mark of circumcision identified families into which marriage was possible or appropriate. It continues to a large extent to inform modern society in the same way. Male circumcision is one of the primary means parents have for the continued protection of their daughters. Circumcision acts as a guardian in two ways. First of all it has an effect on health and hygiene, both of the husband and wife. It is thus one of the most important factors in family life. Furthermore, it represents the likelihood that one's daughter who has become a wife will be dealt with in terms of divine law rather than in terms of economic or social competition, where the average status of women declines, if only because of their biologically determined handicaps to engage in such competition for survival, that is, the normal conditions of pregnancy and breast-feeding as well as the average physical strength of women being less than that of men. Circumcision becomes a sign of women's rights under divine law, and thus has a very direct social significance. Circumcision of males defines their family as a participant in society. Failure to circumcise male children puts the family outside the pale of regulated society into the state in which lawless competition determines all behaviour. This is basically the situation resulting from Christian rejection of circumcision and its underlying principles.

An implication of circumcision as the defining feature of social boundaries is the suppression of the importance of other boundary-defining devices. Circumcision implies the extension of social boundaries over racial, national, and sectarian limits, and creates the umma or people of God. It aids the family in its confrontation with usurping social and governmental agencies by creating a social grouping which ignores their hegemony.

## 7. Hospitality: the family meeting society.

Genesis 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

Qur'an 11:69 There came Our Messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, "Peace!" He answered, "Peace!" and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf.

In the ideal society, where the family is the unit of religion and government, temporary isolation from the extended family, because of travel or for other reasons, can create situations of crisis in security. Non-scriptural forms of government and business, with their peace-keeping forces and hostilities, can blind one to the divinely established extended social role of the family. The family is the center of hospitality, and hospitality is a sacred duty for the preservation of peace and security. The breakdown of this practice is one of the foremost sources of the excuse to engage in non-scriptural governmental and business activities. Therefore the sacredness of hospitality cannot be underestimated.

The example of Abraham (as) was to feed and refresh travelers whom he did not know. Such hospitality in this example is an activity in which the whole family shared. The provision of the necessities of life falls on the family. But when one is separated from one's family, that provision must fall on other families. The only alternative is to provide other institutions, and these have proved to be not only non-scriptural, but to have by and large a detrimental effect on spiritual values. The loss of extended hospitality is related to a consequent need for accommodation and food from institutions other than the family. To the extent that these institutions are divorced from the family, they foster isolation, unfavorable forms of entertainment, and eventually prostitution, intoxication, and other excesses. At a certain point these excesses are perceived as a problem in Western societies, but the root



of the evil is never understood, and for this reason the solutions are never effective. The trend can be effectively reversed by simply reinstating the Scriptural value of hospitality as a central characteristic of the family.

#### 8. Divine Guidance: confronting convention with obedience to God.

Genesis 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. 2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. Qur'an 37:101 So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear. 102 Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!" (The son) said: "O my father! Do as thou art commanded: Thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

103 So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), 104 We called out to him, "O Abraham! 105 "Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" --Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. 106 For this was obviously a trial-- 107 And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: 108 And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times: 109 "Peace and salutation to Abraham!"

The story of Abraham (as) sacrificing his eldest son has provided material for conflict between the religious traditions, one side claiming that Isaac (as) was the son named and the other side claiming that Ishmael (as) was the son of promise. Such controversy overlooks the cultural context of the event as well as its implications. In order to see the social implications of this event, it is necessary to review its cultural and religious milieu. The sacrifice of children was widespread in ancient times and especially prevalent in Canaanite religion. The substitutionary sacrifice of children in a rite of passage or initiatory ritual has been just as widely spread. The Biblical text is permeated with the typical phrases of such an initiatory ritual. It is clear that Abraham (as) performed this rite for each of the first-born sons of his wives, for both Ishmael (as) and Isaac (as). What is of particular importance is the fact that Abraham (as) performed this rite while

living among people who actually killed their own children in sacrifice to Canaanite gods. He showed his faith in being willing to flaunt social and religious convention. The sacrifice of children was considered absolutely essential to the well-being of society in that part of the Middle East at that time. By failing to kill his first-born children, Abraham (as) opened himself to violent criticism. His performance of a substitutionary rite probably did little to allay that, although the rumour that the sacrifice was prevented by divine intervention may have reduced the danger. But to the extent that their flaunting of convention became known, the family of Abraham (as) may have been exposed to outright danger from an enraged populace. The social ramifications of Abraham's faithfulness to divine law when it ran contrary to popular custom are deep and significant.

The sacrifice of Abraham (as), both in the case of Isaac (as) and that of Ishmael (as), has far-reaching implications. Conformity to social conventions which are contrary to divine law is a great temptation. It is easy to pretend that such conformity is necessary for the preservation of peace. In the light of Abraham's (as) actions, it would appear that such contentions are mere excuses for the desire to be like the ungodly. The Abrahamic example informs us first of all that obedience to divine law is of more importance than conformity in the name of peace. It is the only means of preserving the family in the face of a challenging society. It is the only means of redeeming that challenging society and bringing a sane influence to bear upon it.

The rite itself, however, raises other questions. The substitutionary, redemptive rite for the first-born son of every woman does not have universal application. It is already given a different configuration in the Mosaic ritual. It has been replaced in Islam with a commemorative rite during the pilgrimage. This is an example of the shift in practice which has taken place over the ages. All prophets have been given the same faith and message, and to a great degree the same practices. But there is and has always been an area in which practice varies. These variations can be seen in the writings of the prophets, but they are most prominent in the application of divine law made by the divinely appointed guides. As people are faced with the details of a particular situation, the application of divine law may vary as it meets the practicalities of that situation.

Apparently in the time and place of Abraham (as), the redemptive rite served the purpose best. In our own day, the commemorative rite is for our best good, and has therefore been

prescribed for us in the Qur'an. The example of Abraham (as) is one of obedience in any case, and his example inspires us to obey God rather than to conform to non-scriptural practices in whatever place or time we live. This implies seeking and following divine proof, adhering to the guidance of the divinely appointed for our own time. The fact that this issue lies within the context of a matter which shows change down through the ages is important. There is a temptation to consider that only the universally binding issues are of importance. Abraham was faithful even in a matter of only temporary validity. The implication is that the Scripturally-oriented family ought not to conform to non-scriptural social mores even in matters which may seem of little importance.

## 9. Summary.

The description of the family of Abraham (as) in the Book of Genesis is most thought-provoking as it relates to the social issues of ancient as well as modern times. Several issues and principles arise naturally from the text. The first is that the Scriptural foundation of society, the family, escapes all social and political controls to be set directly under the authority of the divinely appointed representative of God on earth. The family has the duty to preserve itself from those influences in society which countermand divine law even to the extent of engaging in dissimulation if necessary. On the other hand, the family has the duty to compromise its potential for economic profit if necessary in order to maintain its integrity and peace. The family as the sole regenerative source of society has the duty of reproduction and may, according to Scripture, even engage in polygamy if necessary to maintain itself as a moral influence over and against social excesses. The family as the only truly valid unit of society determines and defines social boundaries through the practice of the circumcision of male children, thus creating a society based on divine law and the interests of the weak over and against a society based on ruthless social and economic competition. The central characteristic of the family, hospitality, when taken as a social institution, is one of the foremost barriers to such social excesses as unfavourable entertainment, prostitution, and intoxication. Finally, it is the duty of the family to maintain adherence to divine law in the face of social pressures to conform to other standards.

While Islamic law is based on the Qur'an and the Sunna, an inspection of the Biblical texts relating to Abraham (as) prove to be vitally enlightening as a confirmation of the abiding value of Islamic values on the role and influence of the family in society.

## Lecture Four: The Sacrifice of Abraham (as), What Is All the Fuss?

There is a traditional approach to the problem of the sacrifice of Abraham of one of his sons. Most commentators agree that the story represents a divine test, whereby Abraham's faithfulness was proven. The idea is that God gave him a command to sacrifice his beloved son, and in showing himself willing to do so, he showed his extraordinary faithfulness and obedience to God. Muslims, Jews and Christians agree on this point.

The traditional point of contention is in that the Bible reports the sacrifice for Isaac (as), whereas the Qur'an reports it for Ishmael (as). The result has been disagreement between Muslims on one hand, and Christians and Jews on the other, on the question of which son was supposed to be sacrificed as a test of obedience.

There are a few alternative suggestions, but the most novel one I have discovered is that of Rabbi Ben-Yehuda. Rabbi Ben-Yehuda has suggested that Isaac was actually sacrificed according to the story in Genesis 22, and later resurrected to marry Rebecca. In this essay, I examine this theory in detail, and offer an anthropologically based alternative. Ben-Yehuda's evidence is carefully weighed here and found wanting. The fact that Isaac is called Abraham's only son suggests a different interpretation of the events altogether, one which takes into account the rite of passage as an explanation of redemption ritual for the first-born of every woman.

In *The Institute of Judaic-Christian Researcher*, Volume 1, November 1986, Rabbi E. Ben-Yehuda published an article entitled *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. The author gives only one stated purpose for the examination of this issue. "All Jewish responses have come up short before the Christian claim that the enormity of the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross makes it absolutely necessary for all Jews to accept his Messianic role as well as his divinity. The following dissertation tries to show that the Jews had an incident in their history long predating the Passion which had a similar impact upon the Jewish outlook" (page 1). The only stated motive is "coming to grips" with that issue.

The point of departure is the idea that there is a weakness in Jewish faith if there is no sacrifice for sin by which God may grant grace to humankind. “Since sacrifices are no longer offered in Judaism, where do you expect to find God’s grace?” (page 2). The rabbi finds the missing foundation of grace in the binding of Isaac. “In the liturgy, again and again we mention “the binding of Isaac” as a cause for God to automatically forgive the sins of Isaac’s descendants” (page 2).

After this introduction, the rabbi finds the following evidence that Isaac was actually sacrificed as reported in Genesis 22, and then later raised from the dead.

1. It is questionable that an omniscient God would need to “test” Abraham. The radical N-S instead of N-S-H is the word actually used. Thus, the translation of “test” is a misunderstanding of the text. It should rather be “banner” or “example”, instead of “test” (page 2).
2. Why should the mere binding of Isaac be such an earth-shattering event as the Jewish liturgy suggests? (page 2).
3. “Jewish commentary states ‘God Himself commanded the offering of Isaac – but would Abraham allow a mere angel to countermand his Maker?’” “The commentary explains, ‘the angel spoke to Abraham and Abraham refused to stop, saying God commanded, only He can stop me’” (page 2).
4. The command not to injure Isaac meant that he must be offered whole and uninjured (page 3).
5. The words can be interpreted as ‘another ram’ or ‘an after-ram’ (page 3).
6. Tahat bno means under his son rather than instead of his son (page 3).
7. “This thing” and “you did not spare your son” in Genesis 22:15-17 indicate that Isaac was sacrificed (page 3).
8. The text reports that both Abraham and Isaac went up, but that only Abraham returned (page 3).
9. Abraham went directly to Be’er Sheva. Genesis 23:2 reports that Sarah died in Kirjath-arba. Therefore Abraham could not face Sarah after sacrificing Isaac, and Sarah died of sorrow upon hearing that Isaac was dead (page 3).
10. Genesis 23:2 reports that Abraham “came” to mourn for Sarah, but no mention is made of Isaac (page 3).
11. Genesis 24 describes obtaining a wife “for Isaac”, that is, Abraham would raise up seed in Isaac’s name. There is no input of Isaac, but

Rebecca is asked if she would agree. Rebecca was shocked to find Isaac alive, so she fell off her camel and covered her face (page 3).

12. Isaac came from the way of the well lahay roi', the well of Life of Him who sees me, which is a reference to his having been resurrected (page 4).

13. The reference of resurrection in Jewish prayers is in the present (page 4).

14. Isaac was comforted after his mother's death upon his marriage to Rebecca three years after the event, showing that he had just learned of it when he was resurrected (page 4).

15. The Jewish practice of Kidush Hashem is based on the death and resurrection of Isaac (page 4).

I shall examine each of these arguments in order.

1. It is questionable that an omniscient God would need to "test" Abraham. The radical N-S instead of N-S-H is the word actually used. Thus, the translation of "test" is a misunderstanding of the text. It should rather be "banner" or "example", instead of "test" (page 2).

The radical N-S-H is used 36 times in the Hebrew Scriptures almost always with the clear sense of "putting to the test". Examples are Exodus 15:25; 1Samuel 17:39 and 1Kings 10:1. Genesis 22:1 does not appear to depart from this clear usage. However, if the text does in fact mean that God "made an example" of Abraham, rather than "putting him to the test", the result does not appreciably foster any particular interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac. It does not indicate that Isaac was therefore actually sacrificed rather than merely bound to the altar.

2. Why should the mere binding of Isaac be such an earth-shattering event as the Jewish liturgy suggests? (page 2).

If there is a continual reference to the binding of Isaac in Jewish literature, this does support the rabbi's contention that the experience of Isaac had a great impact on Jewish faith. It does not follow that Isaac was actually sacrificed. It does not even thereby follow that the belief that Isaac was sacrificed was ever widespread in Judaism. The liturgical reference quoted notes "binding", not actual sacrifice. As such, it speaks against the rabbi's premise.

3. “Jewish commentary states ‘God Himself commanded the offering of Isaac - but would Abraham allow a mere angel to countermand his Maker?’” “The commentary explains, ‘the angel spoke to Abraham and Abraham refused to stop, saying God commanded, only He can stop me.’” (page 2).

This argument is based on the conflict between the messages of Elohim God in Genesis 22:1-2 and of the angel of the Lord in Genesis 22:11-12. The implication is that Abraham perceived these as two conflicting commands, originating in two different sources, and chose to obey Elohim God as having greater authority than the angel of the Lord.

The problem with this interpretation is that there is no other precedent in the Hebrew Scriptures for the angel of the Lord contradicting God. In fact, the angel of the Lord so closely represents YHWH that he sometimes speaks in the first person I as YHWH, note Genesis 16:10, and even me at the end of Genesis 22:12. The linguistic confusion between the angel of the Lord and YHWH Himself is compounded in Genesis 18 where the celestial figures are never called angels, but only men and YHWH, who behaves and acts like a man. A case could be made, at least in Genesis 18 and Genesis 22:12, for YHWH being an elliptical expression for angel of the Lord (YHWH). In Genesis 19 the same figures are consistently called angels.

Genesis 22:12 maintains agreement between Elohim God and the angel of the Lord. It states for I know that thou fearest God. In sum, the text gives no support for a conflict between God and the angel of the Lord.

4. The command not to injure Isaac meant that he must be offered whole and uninjured (page 3).

This argument accepts agreement between the angel of the Lord and God. The words of the angel by this interpretation do not prohibit the sacrifice of Isaac, but rather prohibit injuring Isaac before the sacrifice. The import of the words would thus be that Isaac must be in perfect condition at the moment of the sacrifice.

Since this argument is in conflict with the third argument, one or the other interpretation must be chosen. Both are not acceptable. If we accept two possible interpretations of the first half of verse 12, the second half will clarify which of them is valid. According to argument



four, the meaning of the text would read thus: “Do not injure Isaac, because the sacrifice must be unblemished: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” There is no sense connection between the first and second half of the verse. According to the traditional interpretation the sense of the text would read thus: “Do not injure Isaac or carry out the sacrifice to completion: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” In this case, the text is coherent. The first half interrupts the sacrifice, and the second half indicates that the test is finished, since Abraham did not withhold his son.

5. The words can be interpreted as “another ram” or “an after-ram” (page 3). The implication is that the ram is an additional sacrifice to the sacrifice of Isaac, since it is “another” or “after”. The KJV translates “ahar/other/after” as “behind him” with the pronoun in italics, indicating that it is added. The NIV leaves out the word altogether, saying “there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.”

In this point the rabbi is right. The most linguistically logical understanding of the words is another ram. It is also correct that Isaac is the only figure which could be the first ram, since it has been made plain that no other animal was provided in Genesis 22:7. It does not follow, however, that Isaac was therefore sacrificed. It only follows that he was a ram to be offered up. The ram caught in the bushes was another sacrificial animal.

6. Tahat bno means “under” his son rather than “instead of” his son (page 3).

It is true that the word tahat means under. It is used as such in Genesis 1:7. However, the word also means instead of, and is used as such in Genesis 2:21 “and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof”. It would be nonsense to translate under in this case. The word is used as instead of in Genesis 4:25; 30:15; Leviticus 14:42; 2Samuel 19:14. It is used as under in Genesis 7:19; Exodus 32:19; and possibly 1Chronicles 29:34. It is used in the sense of for the sake of in Exodus 21:26. It is used as by means of in Psalm 66:17. It is used as whereas in Isaiah 60:15. Finally it is combined with other particles for other meanings in the book of Jeremiah. The great variety of meanings

for the word, and the fact that it is used in the sense of under in a minority of the biblical cases, speaks against the rabbi's proposal. Finally, the sense of under makes no sense at all. If the ram is sacrificed under Isaac, how was it placed, since Isaac was already bound to the altar? If the ram is sacrificed under Isaac, then it seems that the ram is not *ahar/another/a second* but the first. The translation of *instead of* is the only translation that makes any linguistic sense at all.

7. "This thing" and "you did not spare your son" in Genesis 22:15-17 indicate that Isaac was sacrificed (page 3).

The rabbi refers to the expression in Genesis 22:16 *hast not withheld thy son* to show that Isaac was sacrificed. The same expression, *loo chasakhtaa eth binkhaa*, is found in Genesis 22:12. In Genesis 22:12 Abraham had clearly not yet sacrificed Isaac, and yet he had already fulfilled whatever it meant not to have withheld him. Since the expression clearly does not refer to having carried out a burnt offering in Genesis 22:12, there is no reason to suppose that it refers to having carried out a burnt offering in Genesis 22:16.

8. The text reports that both Abraham and Isaac went up in Genesis 22:8, but that only Abraham returned in Genesis 22:19 (page 3).

The rabbi's report of the text is exact. The fact, however, that both are mentioned on the trip up, and only one on the trip down, does not mean that Isaac did not return. In Genesis 12:14 it says that Abram was come into Egypt. It does not say that Sarai went with him. In fact, the preceding verses show that Abram was afraid to take her with him to Egypt. Using the rabbi's method of interpretation, we might infer from this that at the last moment they decided she should not go, rather than lie about their relationship. Yet, despite the fact that the text states only that Abram went down to Egypt, lo and behold, the same verse continues "the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair". If it were not for verse seventeen, where Sarai's name is mentioned, we might even conclude, using the rabbi's method of interpretation, that Abram had a different and temporary wife for the trip to Egypt.

Genesis 22:19 concludes that they went together to Be'er Sheba. Although the young men are also mentioned, we have as much

right to conclude that Isaac went along as we do to conclude that Sarai went down into Egypt in Genesis 12.

9. Abraham went directly to Be'er Sheva. Genesis 23:2 reports that Sarah died in Kirjath-arba. Therefore Abraham could not face Sarah after sacrificing Isaac, and Sarah died of sorrow upon hearing that Isaac was dead (page 3).

The rabbi suggests that Abraham went to Be'er Sheva instead of returning to Sarah. But Genesis 21:33, only two verses before that command to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham is living in Be'er Sheva. Although the text does not say so, it might not be too much to assume that his wife Sarah was living there with him. Genesis 21:34 indicates that Abraham lived in Be'er Sheva for a long time. The expression many days does not have the connotation it does in English of only a few weeks. It is similar to the expression in Psalm 23:6, translated by both the KJV and NIV as for ever. There is a break in the narrative with Genesis 22:1, so it is possible to suggest that Abraham was living at that time in parts unknown. But the fact that Genesis 22:19 says that he went to Be'er Sheva suggests strongly that he started out from there, and that Sarah was waiting for him there, unless indeed she was waiting with the young men. The text just does not mention Sarah at all, and by the rabbi's reasoning, as we shall see, that could very well mean she was dead, and resurrected to die again in Genesis 23.

The best way to understand the text is to assume that Abraham and Sarah were living at Be'er Sheva at least until the close of Genesis 22:19. There is another break in the narrative at Genesis 22:20, which continues into the beginning of Genesis 23. There is therefore no textual reason to assume that Abraham was avoiding Sarah.

10. Genesis 23:2 reports that Abraham "came" to mourn for Sarah, but no mention is made of Isaac (page 3).

The rabbi suggests that Isaac must have been dead because he is not mentioned to have been present at the funeral of his mother Sarah. Again, such a conclusion from what the text does not say is unwarranted, as we have already seen. It is clear that Sarah went down into Egypt, even though the text only said that it was Abraham who went down. It is clear that Sarah was alive during the time of Genesis 22, even though it does not state that she was present at so important a

rite of passage as the sacrifice of her son Isaac. It is also clear from the text that Isaac is alive at the death of his mother. He was still alive in Genesis 22:12 and in Genesis 24:6.

11. Genesis 24 describes obtaining a wife “for Isaac”, that is, Abraham would raise up seed in Isaac’s name. There is no input of Isaac, but Rebecca is asked if she would agree. Rebecca was shocked to find Isaac alive, so she fell off her camel and covered her face (page 3).

The rabbi’s first point is that Abraham should redeem Isaac, who was dead, by raising up seed with a wife for Isaac. This argument is destroyed by the fact that in Genesis 24:6 Abraham commands the servant not to take his son Isaac back to the land of his kindred. The implication is clearly that Isaac was alive and that the wife was for him personally.

The rabbi’s second point is that there is no input from Isaac, while Rebecca’s opinion is closely investigated. Therefore, Isaac is dead. However, there is no need to mention Isaac’s input, since we can safely assume that at the ripe age of forty he was very willing to marry. His input need be mentioned only in the contrary case. The close investigation of Rebecca’s opinion is not in conflict with the practice of arranged marriages or with Middle Eastern marriage standards. To think the contrary is merely a Western prejudice.

The rabbi’s third point is that Rebecca’s behaviour in falling off the camel and veiling herself indicates surprise at Isaac’s resurrection. Genesis 24:64 says that she alighted from the camel. The root is N-P-L which indeed is commonly used in the sense of falling. It is one of the two general words used for getting down from a mount or vehicle, however. It is used as such in 2Kings 5:21 as well as Genesis 24:64. The rabbi’s interpretation is neither linguistically natural nor necessary. The experience of a woman falling from the height of a camel, which is much higher than a horse, would necessitate much more than merely adjusting her veil. In the country areas of the Middle East today it is still the practice for a woman to get down from a mount if she meets a man coming toward her on the road. There is nothing in Rebecca’s behaviour to show surprise. On the contrary, her behaviour is normal, which speaks against any surprise resurrection.

12. Isaac came from the way of the well lahay roi', the well of Life of Him who sees me, which is a reference to his having been resurrected (page 4).

The rabbi interprets Isaac coming from the way of the well lahay roi' as evidence of his having been resurrected. However, the words do not have this symbolic meaning in the text. They refer to a literal well of water so named by Hagar in Genesis 16:13-14. The meaning of God seeing is attached to the experience of Hagar, not to Isaac. It is not in the least an evidence of Isaac's having been resurrected.

13. The reference of resurrection in Jewish prayers is in the present (page 4).

The rabbi concludes that the reference in Jewish prayers to God raising the dead, since it is couched in the present tense, whatever he means by that, since there is no present tense in Hebrew, implies that God is already now a raiser of the dead. Since God is already now a raiser of the dead, He must have resurrected Isaac. If we accept the rabbi's premise that God is already now a raiser of the dead, it does not imply that Isaac is one of those raised. There are biblical references to other people who were raised from the dead, namely the widow's son at the time of Elijah (1Kings 17:17 ff), and the Shunamite woman's son at the time of Elisha (2Kings 4:8 ff). If the argument turns on the time, based on the fact that there is no resurrection mentioned in Genesis before Isaac, it also raises a theological issue of even greater moment. If God is supposed to become a raiser of the dead at a certain moment, rather than be a raiser of the dead essentially, then there is an implication of change in God as well as God being subservient to time. The Rabbi's presupposition is precisely that of secularism, which is in fact a form of Christianity. It presupposes time and space to be absolute and in effect a deity, so that even God is controlled thereby.

Although Jewish prayers may indicate something of importance in Jewish life, which was the purpose of the rabbi's study in the first place, they cannot provide evidence on whether or not the text of Genesis actually reports a real sacrifice and resurrection or not.

14. Isaac was comforted after his mother's death upon his marriage to Rebecca three years after the event, showing that he had just learned of it when he was resurrected (page 4).

It does not follow. It is certainly possible that Isaac might have mourned his mother for as long as three years, to the extent that his marriage was a comfort to him. There is no evidence for Isaac's death and resurrection in this.

15. The Jewish practice of Kidush Hashem is based on the death and resurrection of Isaac (page 4).

Although a belief in the death and resurrection of Isaac may have had an impact on some Jews to inspire them to be faithful in martyrdom, that belief is hardly essential to such faithfulness. Such faithfulness is not evidence either for belief in the death and resurrection of Isaac, nor for the factuality of the event.

At this point it is possible to make a general evaluation of the study. The first problem is the rabbi's motive and premise. His motive is skewed, so his results cannot help but be skewed. The only proper motive for studying the text is to find truth, the truth about what was originally meant by the text and how that might apply to one's own faith and experience. The rabbi is not interested in finding the truth but, by his own words, he is motivated by the desire to find Christian motifs in Judaism. He wants to find a functional replacement for the death of Jesus on the cross as a channel of divine grace. With this purpose in mind, he latches on to the sacrifice of Isaac.

The premise also remains undemonstrated. The premise is that faith in the martyred and resurrected one will automatically make it possible for God to forgive sin. Although this premise is accepted by Christianity, a Jewish scholar has the duty of demonstrating its validity. The rabbi makes no attempt to do so. He merely accepts this Christian viewpoint and begins from there. This is a serious methodological flaw.

There are several types of weaknesses in the rabbi's argumentation. First of all, there are several linguistic errors. It is as though the computer mind-set has deprived researchers of basic linguistic intelligence. To choose one meaning of a word and apply it across the board constitutes a mechanical superficiality and lack of analytical integrity that would have been unthinkable before the age of mechanical translators. Such methodology is found in the rabbi's way of handling the words *tahat* (instead of) and *tippol* (she got down). His use of these words is outright error of translation.

There are other linguistic problems as well. Symbolic interpretation is unacceptable when the text clearly has a literal meaning. The rabbi makes this mistake in dealing with the expression well of lahay roi'. Another linguistic error is to give the same expression in the same context two different meanings, unless the context requires it. The rabbi does this with the expression hast not withheld thy son, which occurs twice in the passage in question. Finally, the rabbi presents linguistic arguments that are not relevant to the question as though they were, as in his treatment of the radical N-S-H.

There are errors of logic as well. The rabbi presents conflicting interpretations of the meaning of Genesis 22:12 as evidence for the same interpretation of Isaac's sacrifice. This is logically impossible and greatly weakens his argument. The rabbi draws unwarranted conclusions from things left unstated in the text: that Isaac did not return with Abraham after the sacrifice, that Isaac did not attend his mother's funeral, and that Isaac was not involved in plans for his marriage. Argument based on nothing cannot be worth more than zero. Finally, the rabbi makes mistakes in logic by drawing unwarranted conclusions from statements in the text. He draws the conclusion that Sarah was in Kirjath-arba when Abraham was in Be'er-Sheva on the basis of the fact that she died there. The data in the text are insufficient to draw that conclusion.

The rabbi draws conclusions on mistaken cultural and psychological assumptions. He errs in finding investigation of a woman's feelings incongruous with arranged marriage. He errs in thinking that Isaac would not mourn for his mother for up to three years.

There are at least two more fatal flaws in the rabbi's study. The first is the dependence on a conflict between Elohim God and the angel of the Lord. There is no precedent for this in Scripture, the text does not require it, and it raises problematic theological issues for which the rabbi makes no account. The idea of a conflict between Elohim God and the angel of the Lord is totally unacceptable on the basis of the biblical text.

The second fatal flaw is the rabbi's failure to consider texts which clearly speak against the death and resurrection of Isaac. Among these is Genesis 24:6, which states Isaac to be alive at a point when according to the theory he had not yet been resurrected.

The study is also flawed by the failure to consider texts in the passage which actually do present problems. The most obvious of these are Genesis 22:2 and Genesis 22:16, where Isaac is called the only son of Abraham. There was never a time when Isaac was Abraham's only son. This is the one feature of the story which most obviously demands attention, and we may thank Rabbi Ben-Yehuda for bringing the issue into relief.

The rest of this study will re-examine the biblical text, but with the motive of explaining what appear to be inconsistencies in it. The basic assumption is that the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, at least insofar as Genesis 22 is concerned, is consistent and can be successfully harmonized with itself.

In Genesis 22:2 (and in Genesis 22:16), Isaac is called the only son of Abraham. This is inconsistent with the report in the Masoretic Text of Genesis 16:15 which states that Hagar bore Abram a son called Ishmael. In Genesis 17:17-19, it is apparent that Ishmael was alive before the birth of Isaac. Genesis 21:2-3 reports the birth of Isaac after the circumcision of Ishmael at the age of thirteen (Genesis 17:25). Finally, Genesis 25:9 reports Ishmael to be alive after the events in Genesis 22. Isaac was not, therefore, according to the text the only son of Abraham at the time of the events in Genesis 22 or at any time previous to them.

There are other problems with the story besides the textual one. Judaism generally interprets the story as a revelation to Abraham that God does not accept human sacrifice. The Christian interpretation of the story generally emphasizes the lesson of obedience. The Christian is thus faced with a theological conflict in the command to offer the son as a burnt offering. Such a command conflicts with the commandment in Exodus 20:13, Thou shalt not kill. Although theologians may well resolve the issue somehow in their own minds, most Christians are left in a quandary. They cannot understand how God could command anyone actually to kill his own child.

If we understand the story as it generally is – that God actually commanded Abraham to kill his own child – then there are some narrative problems with the story as it appears in the Bible. The conversation in Genesis 22:7-8 does not fit into the course of events in which Abraham intended actually to kill Isaac. Isaac asks where the lamb is, as though a lamb were going to be offered and not himself. Abraham answers as though a lamb were going to be offered and not Isaac. Furthermore, there is no evidence to follow that Abraham



informed Isaac later of the true character of the sacrifice, yet Isaac is a willing and knowing participant throughout.

What the Bible actually describes is an event in which a father takes his son, goes to a secluded place in a totally male group which is left to guard, further secludes himself with his son, performs a mock sacrifice of the son, then sacrifices an animal as a burnt offering, and returns apparently without the son.

Throughout the process, Isaac is called the only son. He is so called nowhere else in the Genesis recital. This factor is unique to this event. The event consists of sacrificial actions and a series of statements or questions and responses. The text presents itself as consistent, despite the incongruity of some of the speeches. The text ignores the theological problems of divine temptation and human sacrifice, as though these were not issues.

At this point we have exhausted the biblical information. It is necessary to look for explanatory material outside the text itself. There are several factors to look for. If possible, we should find examples of mock sacrifices of young men by their fathers or other authorities followed by a replacement sacrifice of an animal. These sacrificial events should include a series of speeches which might ignore the factual situation.

In 1909, A. van Gennep identified precisely this type of situation in his book *Les rites de passage*. The rite of passage of this type is performed on boys of a certain age, although there are similar rites in some societies dealing with girls as well. The rite always includes set speeches in what is called an initiatory structure. There is a mock killing of the youth, a replacement animal sacrifice, and a mock resurrection of the youth. There is often a period of seclusion for the youth or especially seclusion from the opposite sex. At the end of the rite, the youth has passed from childhood to adulthood, and may marry and carry out other adult behaviour; or he passes from one status to another in his adult life.

Although the liturgy or ritual of the rite of passage is usually found in non-literate societies, there are examples of texts with an initiatory structure in the various classical religious texts of the world. One of these is the first section of the Kathopanishad, one of the Vedic Upanishads known in classical Hindu Scriptures. There are certainly more precedents for initiatory structure in ancient religious texts from around the world, and there is no reason at all why we should not

expect to find one in the Bible. It is clear that the story of the sacrifice of Isaac contains all the essentials of such a sacrificial ritual.

If the story is reporting a rite of passage liturgy, the speeches are set speeches relating to the ritual. They are certainly presented as having occurred on a particular time in a particular place with specific individuals involved, but they must be understood to have occurred in the case of every young man in the given culture when appropriate.

The rite begins with the instigation of God, who calls Abraham in Genesis 22:1. The response of God in verse 2 is also couched in the traditional phrases of the ritual. This explains why Isaac is consistently called the only son here. It is a part of the ritual. It is possible that the ritual is in reference to the first-born of every woman. The marking of the first-born is a consistent feature through much of the Bible. The consecration of the first-born of every woman is described first in Exodus 13 and in later passages. The expression would generally hold true, and would only fail in the situation of polygamy, as in the case of Abraham. Yet even in the case of polygamy, the same ritual words would be attached to the sacrificial event, since the same traditional liturgy or appropriate words for the sacrifice would always be used.

The common traits of a rite of passage fit into the Genesis story like this. The all-male group leaves on a three-day trek (Gen. 22:3,4). Those not actively participating are left to wait and guard (Gen. 22:5). Most rites of passage include such ritual paraphernalia as wood for an offering, fire, and a weapon (Gen. 22:6). Most rites of passage include a standardized text of speeches and responses between the officiant and the initiate (Gen. 22:7,8). Most rites of passage include sacrificial preparations and a mock sacrifice of the initiate in which he is bound or locked in a dark enclosure (Gen. 22:9-10). Most rites of passage include a substitution sacrifice which is discovered (hidden) through a series of speeches, substituted for the initiate, and sacrificed (Gen. 22:11-13). Many rites of passage include the naming of the place or the renaming of the initiate or, more rarely, the officiant (Gen. 22:14). Most initiatory rites of passage end with a blessing on the initiate, an inauguration into adulthood or the appropriate status (Gen. 22:15-18). Some rites of passage end with the youth being required to find his own way home, to demonstrate his newly gained status (Gen. 22:19).

The text of Genesis 22 has been examined from the point of view of an initiatory structure as a rite of passage. No inconsistencies with this theory of interpretation were found in the biblical text.

The reinterpretation of the text as a rite of passage provides a means of accounting for most of the potential inconsistencies of Genesis 22. The incongruities of the speeches, with the glaring inconsistency of calling Isaac Abraham's only son, are seen to be completely consistent with a rite of passage. The theological inconsistency of commanding a human sacrifice disappears. The temptation of God is reduced to the requirement of redeeming the first-born of every woman, or expressing that Abraham is a model for future generations.

The question may be raised whether we have the right to interpret the text as an initiatory structure since there is nothing in the text which says it is such. One might raise a stronger case against another interpretation. To interpret the text otherwise would leave us with the problems mentioned above, some of which are crucial and some of which are glaringly apparent. We are justified in accepting an initiatory explanation for more reasons than that it is so wide-spread throughout the world in many cultures in Australia, Asia, Africa and America. The fact that initiatory structures are found in other religious texts, such as the Kathopanishad, although certainly suggestive, does not impel us to accept it in the case of a biblical text. We are justified in accepting the initiatory interpretation because the redemption of the first-born is commanded in Exodus 13 and described and alluded to many times. Anything that is commanded and alluded to must also have a practice. It is the practice that is described in Genesis 22.

It must be mentioned that this text, the Sacrifice of Isaac, has had a great impact on religious experience. The misconception that God might tell someone to engage in human sacrifice has opened the way for criticism of religion altogether on one hand, and to extreme cases of unstable practice on the other. Within Judaism, it appears that the moral of the story is that God taught Abraham in a graphic way that He did not accept human sacrifice. It was so graphic because the practice of human sacrifice in Canaan might otherwise have influenced Abraham and his descendants.

Christianity has seen the moral of the story to be that Abraham's obedience is an example for all to follow. Both Judaism and Christianity have used the story as a source of criticism of Islam. The Qur'an (33:103-106) reports the same events for Ishmael instead of for Isaac. The Muslim commentator might refer to the "only son" in Genesis 22:2 as a remnant of the true text referring to Ishmael, who was the only one who was ever the only son of Abraham in real life.

Such a commentator would suggest that the text was corrupted by the Jews to tell about Isaac instead.

In an initiatory scenario, the facts would have been different. Both Ishmael and Isaac, both being first-born of their mothers, would have had to be redeemed. The initiatory redemption, the substitutionary sacrifice was performed for both of them. In the end, the biblical text is coherent, and the Bible and the Qur'an are both right. Everyone is disarmed and we are all faced with living together in peace. Can we rise to that challenge?

## Lecture Five: Daniel (as): A Young “Muslim” Refugee and How He Coped

It is not an anachronism to call Daniel (as) a Muslim. This is not merely true because the holy Qur'an refers to Biblical figures as Muslims. Nor is it merely a recognition of the fact that Daniel's (as) tomb continues to exist in Iran and is still the site of devotional visits by Muslims. I use the word to refer to someone who intends to submit entirely to the will of God, and this is, in my opinion, the only valid usage of the word. All people, no matter what religious community or organization lays claim to their allegiance, are Muslims, if their intention is to submit their lives, belief, and behaviour to the will of the one true God, Creator of all things. No religious establishment has a monopoly on the epithet.

The experience of Daniel (as) as described in the book of the Bible that bears his name is surely a prime example of such submission. On more than one occasion he and his companions are reported to have risked their lives by disobeying the king in order to be faithful to their commitment to the will of God. I shall examine three of those occasions here, since they particularly deal with issues of interest to Muslims.

### 1. The Permitted Diet

The first narrative is found in Daniel 1:1-20.

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. 3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had

ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. 11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. 16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

The first thing to note about this story is that the young people were captives. They were separated from their families, whose fate is unknown to us and perhaps to the young people themselves. There is every possibility that they had died in the siege or in the battle of Jerusalem. So the young people were not only captives, but possibly orphans as well. Furthermore, they had gone through the ordeal of becoming eunuchs, which was not only humiliating to the highest degree, but definitely life-threatening. It had been impressed upon them that the reason they had suffered all of these things was because their religion and culture were inferior to those of their captors.

On the other hand, these young people were selected for the highest possible honors. Their success in the reconditioning and education being offered them depended on strict submission, but was potentially a road to the greatest honors. So both their suffering and the honors placed before them provided the highest possible incentives for relinquishing the principles of their childhood faith.

The story describes their refusal to eat food that was forbidden by divine law. The divine law of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 is essentially the same as that of Shi'ite Islam. Sunni Islam differs from it in admitting all sea creatures, and Judaism differs from it in forbidding the mixing of milk and meat. This is the law to which Daniel and his friends were faithful.

The four young men were most diplomatic in approaching the matter. The text, however, notes that Daniel purposed in his heart. This means that he would refuse to eat forbidden foods at any cost, even at the cost of his life. The officer himself even feared for his life. The text seems to indicate a miraculous intervention in favour of the young men, although the debilitating effects of rich foods and alcohol on the other students may have contributed to the relative excellence of the four young men as well. Whatever the cause, the text clearly fosters absolute faithfulness. Liberal scholars indeed place its writing in the post-exilic period, which was an era of profound contemplation of these issues in the face of Hellenizing persecution of faithful Jews.

The word “pulse” here refers to a bland, meatless diet, apparently the simple peasant diet that was generally available, probably made up of coarse barley bread and lentils. It was certainly not interesting, varied, or attractive to young people. But it was the only alternative to the court diet, which consisted of fine foods containing flesh from animals that were slaughtered without draining the blood according to divine law, and species of animals that were

forbidden by divine law. Some have considered Daniel to represent a vegetarian faction within Israelite religion at the time, but this is not justifiable. The reason they were reduced to eating the simplest vegetarian food was because acceptable flesh foods were unavailable. There was no one even qualified to slaughter them properly.

The position of the four young men is an extreme example of what Muslim immigrants as well as those born in non-Muslim societies have to face. There is suffering on one hand, the punishment dealt out by society for non-conformity to non-Islamic customs. On the other hand, there is every inducement to seduce Muslim children to be unfaithful to Islamic (and thereby Biblical) principles by reaching for achievements offered in non-Muslim societies. Although it is not likely that any Muslims in non-Muslim countries actually face death for refusing to eat non-halal meat, still the pressures to do so are sufficient to induce many to conform. A review of the experiences of Daniel might make such people pause to think about their behaviour and the reasons for it.

## 2. Idolatry

The second story is found in Daniel 3:1-27.

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: 6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 7 Therefore at that time, when all the people



heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. 9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. 10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: 11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore because the king's

commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. 27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

This story refers to a time when the companions of Daniel were no longer youths, but mature functionaries in Babylon. The significance of the story lies in the fact that they are clearly able to survive in the pagan or secular state and still be true to their childhood faith. This one exceptional event merely confirms this. The story states the deliverance to be miraculous, however, indicating that their success was dependant on more than mere luck, diplomacy and skill.

The first thing that will strike the Muslim reader is the king's reference to one like the Son of God. It is interesting that this is the only reference to the Son of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, although the Greek New Testament includes it a number of times in a number of ways. It is notable that the concept of the Son of God, insofar as Scripture goes, was invented by a pagan king while engaging in idolatrous worship. That ought to give pause for reflection.

The most obvious issue in this story is the issue of prostration in worship to the image of an idol. There is a secondary issue that is not quite so obvious, and that is the role of music. Music is almost universally a vehicle for worship. There are many reasons for this. One is that music creates unified action, making concerted congregational liturgy possible with a minimum of directions. Another reason is that music transmits a common emotion or purpose to the group directly without appeal to reason and the act of decision. In this case it is clear

that music is being used for even more sinister purposes and in even more manipulative ways.

An examination of the musical terms found in Daniel three gives indication of this misuse of music. The word translated “psaltery” in verses 5, 7, and 15 above is *sumponyah* and appears to be based on the Greek word meaning “to sound together” from which we also have the English symphony. The ancient use of sounding tones together to produce certain effects by their intervals is widespread and well-known to musicologists. The art was highly developed by the Sumerians, from whom it was inherited by the Babylonians. It is conceivable that the Babylonians could produce intervals of sound that effected prostration on the crowds of people. In other words, they were forced to fall down by the sound of the music itself. In that case, we are justified in seeing the intention of the text to report a miracle in that the three men were able to resist the effects of the music and remain upright before the golden image. It is very possible that this miracle was seen to have reinforced their intention to faithfulness even in the face of threatened death.

The connection between idolatry and music is one often overlooked, but one that is clearly consonant with Islamic thought. Music in non-Islamic societies that has the reputation of being secular is not thereby divorced from idolatry. It is not the repute of the music that is significant, but the very character of the music. Mass contemporary concerts are characterized by stereotyped behaviour particular to those events, behaviour that is a forced form of idolatry in the guise of swaying, raising the hands, hysterical shouting, and swooning. None of these behaviour patterns occur normally without the stimulation of the required music. Research has shown such music to be not only associated with chemical addiction, but to be an addiction in itself. But research is hardly needed to demonstrate the fact, as every observer and every participant is able to satisfy him or herself of the fact directly.

The story of Daniel’s three friends is a vivid reminder not only of the Islamic principle of avoiding idolatry in all forms, but of the Islamic warning against the misuse of music. Muslims living both in supposed Muslim societies and those living in other societies are all susceptible to the detrimental effects of music. The witness of the book of Daniel is that such music in itself constitutes idolatry, and as such in Islamic terms is *shirk*, association of another with Allah.

### 3. Prayer in Prostration

The third story of the book of Daniel that is highly relevant to Muslim life is the famous story of Daniel (as) in the lions' den as reported in Daniel 6.

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; 2 And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. 3 Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. 4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. 7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. 9 Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. 10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. 12 Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. 13 Then

answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. 14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. 16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. 17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? 21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. 22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

The story is of a time far later than our first meeting with Daniel (as) as a youth. This is significant, for it shows that Daniel (as) retained the forms of worship and the principles of faith that he had attained as a child throughout a long and brilliant diplomatic career in a heathen court. Even if he had retained these as a fresh youth, one might have expected him to conform over time and with maturity. But we find that he has not done so.

There are several points of particular significance here. The first is Daniel's (as) obvious belief that public prayer in prostration towards the holy city three times a day was obligatory. If he had not thought it obligatory, he would certainly have discontinued it for the mere thirty days of the prohibition. It was thus more than his stated custom. It was the expression of his deep religious belief.

Besides the obligation of the prayer, we need to note the obligatory elements of the prayer as well. First, it is addressed to God alone. Secondly, it takes place at regular daily intervals, which are specifically early morning, afternoon, and evening. Thirdly, it includes the physical posture of prostration. Fourthly, it takes place in a specific direction, that is, the city of Jerusalem. The place of sacrifice and worship was moved to Jerusalem at the time of David (as) where it remained until the time of Muhammad (as). Jerusalem was the focus of prayer or the qibla of Daniel's time. It is necessary to note that the temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed probably around the time when Daniel (as) was taken captive. We thus find Daniel (as) praying in the direction of a pile of rubble for seventy years or so. We find him doing so even at the risk of his life. One is overcome with awe before faith of this magnitude, but the implications are devastating for contemporary behaviour. One wonders by what right have the people of any religious tradition paying lip service to the Bible relinquished the practice of daily, regular prayer in prostration towards the holy city. This one narrative alone identifies the Bible as the book of those who pray daily in prostration and of no other people.

Although all three of these narratives from the book of Daniel make strong appeal to miraculous divine intervention, they also raise a very relevant issue. That issue is the possibility of maintaining a pure and active faith and practice within a hostile environment. This is precisely what Muslims are called upon to do, not only in Western societies but oftentimes under the neo-colonial regimes of the Middle East and other parts of the world. The book of Daniel is a strong witness that this is not only possible, but that it is the only right alternative.

Two factors are involved in the process, and it is not my intention to proclaim them as the right way for Muslims to go. Nevertheless, they arise naturally from the text. The first is the attitude of courtesy and diplomacy on the part of the four men in every situation. That is, they do not rise up in rebellion. They do not start revolutions in Iraq or Iran. They deal with the existing powers in ways that are open to them. Secondly, they make no compromise whatsoever with their belief and practice. The result is polite insubordination. It is effective because they are willing to lay their lives on the line.

It appears clear that the book of Daniel is a Biblical text containing issues of the highest relevance specifically to Muslims. It

thus shows the Bible to be much the property of Muslims, much more so than the property of the religious traditions that actually claim it, but which deny in practice the sacred duties expressed in its pages. Beyond this, the book of Daniel appears to be worthy of further, more detailed study for the contemplation of strategies for dealing with these issues that continue to be relevant in the contemporary world. A two-pronged approach, on one hand using valid means of action and avoiding violence, and on the other absolute adherence to Islamic principle and practice, might be far more productive than the perpetration of such tragedies as the events of 11 September 2001.

## Lecture Six: The Book of the Gospel Rediscovered

Wherever I go to lecture I hear one question first of all: “What is the true Gospel of Jesus (as)?” There is always someone who wants to know whether the book of the Gospel has been irretrievably lost, or whether it is to be found among the apocryphal gospels not included by the Church fathers in the canon of the New Testament. I have invariably had to answer that unfortunately all of the books which claim to be the Gospel of Jesus (as) contain passages that are clearly corruptions of the original text, so that even if we could point to one or another book as that received by Jesus as the Gospel, it would not be perfectly intact. This is an area in which historical criticism has served us well.

The canonical gospels, or the books in the Christian Bible which are called gospels, do not claim to be the message of God sent down to Jesus (as). They do not correspond to what the holy Qur’an calls the Injil or Gospel, nor is such a document mentioned in them. They bear the title in Greek, *evangelion*, from which comes the Arabic word Injil, but they do not claim to be divine messages as such. Rather, they are collections of stories about what Jesus (as) did and said. As such, they are much more in the character of Islamic hadith literature than they are in the character of a revealed book as Muslims think of it. Some of the gospels not included in the Bible are collections of sayings, but even these generally remind us more of ahadith than of the holy Qur’an or the Hebrew prophetic writings. None of the so-called gospels even claims to be a book sent down from God to Jesus (as). All of them claim to be the work of one author-witness, not always an eye-witness, but historical criticism leads us to doubt even that in most cases.

Much has been written about the value and validity of the Gospels, both canonical and apocryphal, that we have in our possession. This scholarship might make us turn our sights towards other sources, such as new archeological finds, in our search for the Injil mentioned in the holy Qur’an. So far little in that way has turned up. The Qumran texts, to cite the most popular source, might contain



some passages worthy of examination by the criteria presented below, but do not provide us with a book that in itself could be considered the lost Gospel of Jesus (as).

There is another possibility. It may be that the true Gospel, the book of revelation sent down to Jesus (as) lies buried, not in a cave or under debris of dust and stones, but under the encrusted additions to one or another of the Gospels we possess. The possibility that the true Gospel might be a portion, rather than the whole, of any one of the candidates, seems to have escaped the notice of most seekers.

An examination of the extant Gospels may well bring to light such a document, a book which can be truly considered the revelation once sent down to Jesus the Messiah (as). Before beginning such an examination, however, it is necessary to lay down some criteria by which we might recognize a book of revelation. I offer the following criteria.

1) The Gospel might exist as fragments of the original, part of which has been lost and part of which may have been preserved imperfectly.

2) A book of revelation will be couched mainly in words that can best be ascribed to God Himself, rather than to the prophet.

3) A book of revelation will be highly relevant to the specific religious problems of the time. It will point out innovations as false, and call people to return to forgotten or neglected principles in earlier revelation.

4) A book of revelation will not conflict with the basic principles of faith declared in earlier revelations.

Thus there are considerations of the state of the document, style of speech, relevance, and consistency. By applying these four criteria, there is every likelihood that if any portion of the true Gospel of Jesus (as) remains hidden within the extant gospels, we shall be able to identify it. The criteria are precise enough to distinguish the true Gospel from other material.

Although the material at first appears rather abundant, the second criterion, that of style, requires us to examine only the discourses, and to choose among them those which are couched in words that might best be ascribed to God rather than the prophet. Such an exercise immediately excludes the bulk of material. Some passages in the apocryphal gospels might require further examination, but among the canonical Gospels only the following remains as a candidate after applying the criterion of style: Matthew 23. The

contents of this passage are found scattered through discourses in Luke 11-13, but far more fragmented than in Matthew 23. This suggests that other parts of Jesus's discourses may also be quoted from the original Gospel, without this being apparent. The passage in Matthew 23, however, is clearly one which demands closer examination.

The criterion of style is difficult to apply in detail, because the Gospel must have been originally given in Hebrew or possibly Aramaic, while it has come down to us in Greek. The original language is lacking altogether, although the Syriac versions may come closer to it than the Greek ones, despite the fact that they are probably further translations from the Greek.

The first stylistic criterion is the ascription of speech to God. The whole passage is consistent with this beginning with verse two and ending with verse 35. Verse 36 begins with the words "Truly I say to you" and this may mark the point at which Jesus (as) speaks with his own words. Verses 37 and 38 are therefore ambiguous as to whether they form a part of the divine revelation or constitute the commentary attached to the revelation by the prophet. Verse 39 includes the expression "you shall not see me," with the word "me" clearly referring to the speaker, that is, the prophet himself. Thus verse 39 forms the last possible limit of the divine revelation. We can conclude that at least verses 2-35 may form the text of the Injil sent down to Jesus (as) or a part of it.

A second stylistic criterion might be whether the text shows any likeness to earlier texts of revelation. In terms of length, it is short, but within the bounds of known texts of revelation. The book of the prophet Obadiah consists of only 21 verses, and several others are not much longer. On that basis, the passage in question could actually be the entire text of the Injil, or the greater part of it. As it stands it forms a coherent whole. Most prophetic writings echo something of the revelation to Moses (as). The greater portion of Matthew 23 consists of woes. Woes are known as a literary device in several prophets and are one of the most prevalent forms of Hebrew prophetic utterance. The canonical paradigm is in Deuteronomy 27:15-26, but the form is otherwise common. Jesus himself (as), like other prophets before him, uses the device in his own words in Luke 6:24-26.

In sum, the criterion of style, based on literary form, length of the document, and ascribability of the speech to God, is consonant with the theory that Matthew 23 is a text of divine revelation.

The third criterion is that of relevance. The times of Jesus (as) gave evidence of very particular problems. These were based on the ways in which the various sects of Judaism, faced with Roman rule, sought to accommodate the principles of their faith in view of survival. Two issues were crucial: first, to minimize the principle of divinely appointed leadership which might be seen as a threat to Roman power, and second, to circumvent any practices which might conflict with Roman life. Finally, we should expect to find a condemnation of any who engaged in these two forms of accommodation to Rome. In brief, we should expect Jesus to point out 1) a weakened reliance on divinely appointed leadership which might be a threat to Roman rule, 2) specific features of neglecting the law or misapplying it, and 3) condemnation for such. An examination of the text of Matthew 23 reveals that every verse falls into one of these three categories. The text is thus established as relevant to the times, and therefore consonant with the theory that it is a text of divine revelation.

The fourth criterion is whether or not the text conflicts with earlier revelation. An examination of the passage does not reveal any point which is in conflict with the earlier extant revelation as we have it in the Hebrew writings. Several passages of the law are cited and commented upon in ways consonant with the Hebrew prophets, namely, in terms of justice. The final criterion is satisfied in this. However, the unicity of God is the central issue of revelation, and it is also explicitly maintained in verse 9. The passage can thus be seen not to conflict with earlier revelation, but rather to agree with it in both content and spirit, and to cite it in several matters.

On the basis of all four criteria, it is possible to say that Matthew 23:2-35 is a likely candidate as the Injil of Jesus referred to by the holy Qur'an, or a portion of it. The rest of the canonical gospel material is largely of the character of hadith or tradition, and describes more or less accurately, to the extent one can rely on the opinion of researchers, the words and actions of Jesus (as).

### The True Book of the Gospel: Matthew 23

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 And said, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' place: 3 So everything they tell you to observe, observe and do; but do not follow their example, because they do not act as they speak. 4 For they mandate

heavy burdens and hard to carry, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

The Beginning of the discourse establishes the theme of divine guidance and its misuse. The reference to Moses' seat (as) reveals this clearly. Those who have usurped this appointment are called scribes and Pharisees. The scribes probably relate specifically to the Saducees, who were the official guardians of the faith, collaborators with Rome. They limited the application of the law to its narrowest sense, thus minimizing any conflict with the ruling power. The Pharisees dispensed with the need for divine guidance by laying down scholarly principles of interpretation. This rejection of the divinely appointed leader made it possible to apply the law, through rabbinical interpretation, to a broader segment of life without becoming a threat to Roman hegemony.

In verse three the Gospel recognizes that these two sects maintain the law in some sense, so that when they say that the law must be upheld, they are correct and may be followed. However, their own behaviour is not according to the law, at least in that they ignore divine guidance or the divinely appointed leadership.

This seems to be a citation of the prophet Malachi 2:7,8. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you are departed out of the way, you have caused many to stumble at the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. This text is relevant to the situation, but more importantly situates this passage as a continuation of Malachi, that is, as a prophecy which logically follows the book of Malachi. The book of Malachi is the last book of prophets, and in the Christian Scriptures immediately precedes the Gospel of Matthew.

There is some textual variation in verse four in regard to heavy burdens, but it does not modify the meaning. Verse four adds that their interpretation, which ignores divine guidance, is actually more difficult to observe than verdicts made under divine appointment. That is, qiyas or rabbinical method, is a burdensome approach and turns divine law into a harsh system difficult to carry out.

5 But everything they do, they do to be seen by others: they make their phylacteries broad, and enlarge the borders of their garments, 6 And love the highest places at feasts, and the chief seats

in the synagogues, 7 And greetings in the markets, and for people to call them, Rabbi, Rabbi.

This text points out that the rabbinical method of attaining a verdict, or the use of qiyas, leads to action which may be termed *mura'i*, or action performed for the purpose of being seen and respected by others. Two examples of this are given in making phylacteries large, and lengthening the fringes on their garments. The enlarged phylacteries and the extravagantly long garment fringes have become standard in modern Jewish practice, so that they are no longer a sign of *mura'i* action. The size of these no longer varies. It does not appear that phylacteries and fringes as such are condemned here. Both are based on Mosaic law, but it seems that the phylacteries arose through a misapprehension of Deuteronomy 6:8. Once Hebrew lost its character as the spoken language of the people rabbis often erred in misplaced concreteness. The abstract meaning of the terms of Deuteronomy 6:8 are implicit from Exodus 13:9, where the same expressions are applied to unleavened bread, which cannot be placed between the eyes or worn on the hand.

By the same token, fringes refer in Mosaic law to the tied ends of the woof of a woven outer cloak in one piece, corresponding to a modern blanket. The application of such to an undergarment has no prophetic justification. Thus both practices as a form of spiritual show are irrelevant to modern life, but specifically relevant to first century Palestine.

The expressions of these verses make no comment on the validity of using phylacteries and fringes as such, or attending feasts, synagogues, and markets. The comment is purely in reference to seeking admiration and status. The use of the term *rabbi* is dealt with in the next verse.

8 But you, do not be called Rabbi: for your Master is one, even Christ; and all of you are brothers.

The use of the term *rabbi* is forbidden on the basis that it conflicts with the authority of the Messiah. The text here concentrates on the aspect of Jewish accommodation to Rome which denigrates divine guidance, that is, the divinely appointed leader.

9 And call no one on earth your father: for your Father, who is in heaven, is one.

This text continues the argument against the proliferation of religious authorities to the detriment of the authority of the divinely appointed. It does not refer to the physical, biological relationship, but to the use of the word father as a term of respect for those in authority. At the same time the text affirms the unicity of God. The reference is oblique, because the unicity of God was never questioned in the context of Jesus (as) and first century Judaism. There is no need to belabour it.

10 Do not be called masters either: for your Master, even Christ, is one.

Here the text reaffirms the divine appointment of leadership. The reaffirmation takes the local situation into account. This was the principle that first century Judaism, particularly its leadership, denied.

11 But the one who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Status-oriented Roman society had had an effect on Jewish society. The text here attempts to reverse that.

13 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut people out of the kingdom of heaven: for you do not go into it yourselves, neither do you let those enter it who want to go in.

Here begin the woes, or condemnations. It has been established that the major sects and leadership of first century Judaism had accommodated to Rome by denigrating the role of the divinely appointed leader and by adopting illicit ways of interpreting and applying the law. These are condemned, with the series of woes following. As compared to the New Testament generally, this chapter is particularly well preserved. In some manuscripts, however, this and the following verse are reversed.

14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you eat up widows' houses, and make long prayer for a pretence: therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.

The social concern here is typical of the Hebrew prophetic utterance, and another evidence that this passage may be the lost Gospel of Jesus (as).

15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you go across sea and land to make one convert, and when he is made, you make him twice the child of hell as you yourselves.

Unlike today, first century Judaism was a proselytizing faith. The matter dealt with here is the fact that the proselyte would be unaware that changes had taken place in the faith through accommodation to Rome, and thus would be more likely to embrace the wrong system whole-heartedly. The convert is more enthusiastic than one born in the faith.

16 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is responsible. 17 Fools and blind ones: which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is responsible. 19 Fools and blind ones: which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Whoever therefore swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears by it, and by the one who dwells in it. 22 And the one that swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by the one who sits on it.

This is a reference to the kind of misapplication of the law which arises through the use of a false method of attaining a verdict. Application by the divinely appointed leader is always just, but application by the machinations of a scholar will provide means of circumventing the law for those who look up to his expertise. The relationship which automatically arises between a scholar and an authority demanding a verdict from him is a corrupting one. The specific matter here is the formulation of a legal oath, with the specification that a formal error relieves the client of responsibility.

The practice thus would be to include a formal error whenever one wished to give the impression of making an oath, yet with the intention of disregarding it. The obvious injustice of such an action cannot be missed by the poorest observer, yet all non-imamic law is based on such circumvention. The common term is loophole.

The word “fools” in verse 19 is missing in some manuscripts.

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: you should have done these, and not have left the other undone. 24 Blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Here the text reverts again to the typical social concern to be found in the Hebrew prophets. Again, this is evidence that this passage belongs to the same tradition as the Hebrew prophets in contrast to the rest of the material in the Gospel of Matthew. The clear implication is that this is a part of the book called Injil in the holy Qur'an and sent down to Jesus (as).

25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you make the outside of the cup and the platter clean, but inside they are full of extortion and excess. 26 Blind Pharisee, first clean what is inside the cup and platter, so that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you are like white-washed sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

These condemnations turn on the matter of hypocrisy. The implication is that false methods of attaining verdicts, methods invented for the purpose of accommodating with Rome for survival, lead to hypocrisy if only because the verdicts so obtained do not correspond with the real needs of humankind, as do those attained through the intervention of a duly appointed divine representative. Justice cannot be attained or maintained except by following the divinely given process of prophecy and divine guidance.



29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have participated with them in taking the blood of the prophets. 31 So you are witnesses about yourselves, that you are the children of those who killed the prophets. 32 Fill up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Serpents, generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?

The awfulness of these final woes perhaps goes beyond the expressions of the Hebrew prophets themselves, but is a logical continuation of them. The question of how to escape damnation is answered in the following verse, which is to follow the prophets, the divine guides (sophos), and scribes or transmitters of the written law.

Jesus (as) does not condemn building the tombs of the prophets and garnishing their sepulchres as such, any more than he condemns paying tithes. What he condemns is the hypocrisy of doing so while failing to follow the prophets. This is therefore an oblique justification for caring for and visiting the tombs of the prophets and divine guides (the righteous), a practice which has given rise to some division in Islam.

34 So see, I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will beat in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

The way of salvation is clearly given: it is to follow the instruction of the prophets, submit to the authority of the divinely appointed leaders (sophos), and follow those who transmit the written law. This is followed by the prophecy that the first century Jews will fail to do this, and rather participate in the destruction of those sent to them by God.

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar.

This prophecy probably refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., although the whole condemnation is addressed not to the

Jewish people but to their leaders. Nevertheless, the innocent died with the guilty.

36 Truly I say to you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Here no doubt begins Jesus's (as) commentary on the Gospel. He notes that it will be fulfilled on the contemporary generation, which we see to be historically accurate. The attempted collaboration with Rome did not succeed, partly because of the irritation to the Romans caused by the Zealots and partly because of the perfidity of the Sadducees. The Pharisees survived to bring rabbinical method to a point of perfection. Rabbinical method cannot be treated with the same condemnation as it is here, for it is no longer an attempt to accommodate to Rome, but has become crystalized into a religious system in its own right. It must be judged in part today for other features: 1) the misapplication of certain features of law, 2) failure to recognize the Messiah, 3) failure to recognize the final prophet, and 4) failure to integrate divine guidance into the establishment of right practice. These obviously have their roots in the original accommodation to Rome. This should have been avoided (hindsight is unfortunately more clear-sighted than foresight) by recourse to taqiyya or dissimulation following the example of Abraham (as), rather than any form of accommodation with Rome.

It ought to be pointed out that if this is the Gospel or Injil more or less as Jesus (as) received it, there are vast implications for Christianity. First of all, the Gospel relates primarily to the specific problems within first century Judaism. It does not support or imply the establishment of a system of faith distinct from first century Judaism, not to mention the faith implicit in the Hebrew Scriptures now contained in Christian Bibles. The content of the Gospel emphatically opposes all accommodation with Rome. Unfortunately, Christianity as a historical phenomenon is hardly anything but an accommodation to Rome. The Gospel text does not support the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, it opposes it with the clear presupposition of the unicity of God. The Gospel text does not support the atonement for sin on the cross. Rather, it states categorically that salvation is the product of obedience to divine law as transmitted through the prophets, the divinely appointed leaders, and those who transmit the written law. Finally, there is no justification for the establishment of any such

institution as the Christian Church has become. On the contrary, the authority of divine guidance in the divinely appointed leader is maintained throughout. If the Gospel contains strong language in condemnation of the Jewish leadership in the first century, its implied condemnation of the Christian establishment is devastating.

Despite the fact that the text relates clearly to a particular time and place with its particular problems, it can still serve as a witness of what has always been the right way. First, there is a strong witness of the unicity of God in verse 9. Social concerns imply divine justice time and again. Then the principle of prophecy is strongly expressed. The need for adherence to the divinely appointed leader is a central issue. Finally, human responsibility is maintained even in the face of oppression and the temptation to accommodate for survival in a world without respect for divine law. All comes to a head in the proclamation of divine judgment. These five great principles of true faith are the core of the Gospel.

## Lecture Seven: The Gospel: The Secret the Church Never Told

The Christian Church has been claiming to represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ (as) for centuries. The amazing fact is that Christians never actually tell anybody what the Gospel is according to their own sacred book, the New Testament. Any Christian can tell you what the Gospel is, if you ask him. But the answer is invariably different from the answer given by the New Testament itself.

What is the big secret the Church is keeping under cover, and why do they not want you to know about it? You are about to find out what the big secret is, but the reason the Church has been hiding the facts is something only Christian leaders can explain.

Most Christians one meets contend that the most important thing to know is the Gospel. Yet when one asks them what the Gospel is, the answers vary. The more liturgical types tend to say that the Gospel is the written portion of the Bible which describes the life and death of Jesus (as) on earth. This is a good answer as far as it goes, for each of the four canonical Biblical books referred to as the Gospel contain the word in their title, *to evangelion*, in Greek. But these titles have all been added by a late hand. The more evangelical types answer something on the following order: "The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died to atone for our sins on the cross so that we might be saved through faith in Him."

I followed the advice of my evangelical friends and took a look at the Greek Scriptures, the central Christian source of faith and practice, to see what the Bible says the Gospel is. All of the passages quoted in this study are from the book called the New Testament. If the Gospel is a particular message, the New Testament ought to be very clear about exactly what that message is. I was not surprised to find that the word Gospel appears nearly a hundred times in the King James Version of the New Testament to translate the Greek word *to evangelion*, a word often translated into common speech as the "good news." I was surprised to find that the word is almost always used in a sentence which presupposes that the reader already knows what the good news is. The context may say something about the Gospel, about

its power or glory or even affliction. It may say something, and most generally does, about the preaching of the gospel, by whom and where and under what circumstances. The texts which mention the Gospel without defining it clearly, without telling what the message actually is, are the following: Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 11:5; 26:13; Mark 1:1; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; Luke 4:18; 7:22; 9:6; 20:1; Acts 8:25; 14:7; 14:21; 15:7; 16:10; Romans 1:9; 1:15; 10:15; 10:16; 11:28; 15:16; 15:19; 15:20; 15:29; 1 Corinthians 4:15; 9:12; 9:14; 9:16; 9:17; 9:18; 9:23; 15:1; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 4:3; 4:4; 8:18; 9:13; 10:14; 10:16; 11:4; 11:7; Galatians 2:5; 2:14; 4:13; Ephesians 6:15; 6:19; Philippians 1:5; 1:7; 1:12; 1:17; 2:22; 4:3; 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 2:4; 2:8; 2:9; 3:2 1; Timothy 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1:13; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:12; 4:6; 4:17. Anyone can examine these texts personally, but without finding anything in the text or context to indicate exactly what the message of the Gospel is, exactly what the apostles or Jesus (as) were preaching as the Gospel. This leaves us with a mere handful of texts which reveal anything about the Gospel at all. It is fairly easy to review them and summarize the information they contain.

The first text is in Mark 1:14,15 “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Mark 1:14 says that Jesus (as) came preaching the Gospel. Verse 15 tells what Jesus (as) actually said when he preached the Gospel.

So we can take Mark 1:15 as a summary of the Gospel as Jesus (as) preached it. It contains two items of news or information, and two commands. The first item of information is that the time is fulfilled, that is, that the predicted time of some prophecy had come to a terminus. The second item of information is that the kingdom of God is near. These two pieces of information were very apt for the time and place. They are not universal or eternal messages. They relate specifically to the hopes of the Jews in Palestine at that period of the Roman Empire. The clear implication is that the prophecies gave a specific time for God to set up a kingdom or reign on earth, and that reign should penetrate the Roman empire at the time and place at which Jesus (as) appeared as Messiah. The Gospel portrayed here as information is very local in character.

The two commands given in function of that information are a bit more universal in scope. The first command is to repent. The second is to believe the Gospel, that is, the message that God’s

kingdom was about to penetrate the Roman Empire. The word translated “repent” is *metanoieite* which comes from *metanous*. Just as metaphysics goes beyond the physical to the matters of the mind, this “*metanoia*” goes beyond the matters of the mind. In other words, Jesus (as) appears to be telling the people not to be deceived by what they see and think, but to go beyond that to realize something that their minds could not tell them, that what he is saying is true, that God is about to set up His kingdom. The clear inference is that despite the situation and what it seems to be, they owe their ultimate allegiance to God.

The next text is in Mark 16:15,16. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” This text does not give more detail about the content of the message at all. It refers to the delivering of the message, and the results of it. Some will believe and be saved, and others will not believe, and be damned. That is, some will realize that they owe ultimate allegiance to God, and believing that, they may be saved. Others will deny obedience to the sovereignty of God, and consequently will be lost. An interesting point is that baptism is mentioned along with belief as one of the requisites for being saved. Baptism is not very well defined in the New Testament either. It arose out of the Jewish practices of ablutions, in two contexts. The one was conversion to Judaism, and the other was the baptism of repentance, such as that represented by John. The baptism which came into use among the early followers of Jesus (as) doubtlessly included those characteristics, and apparently more as well. But whatever it meant, it was clearly within a purity code with a practice of ablutions. Furthermore, whatever it meant, it was not a part of the proclamation of the Gospel, but a result and response to it, one coupled with belief in the sovereignty or “kingdom” of God.

Baptism is the first matter that is associated with the Gospel in this text, but it is not the only one. If it is intrinsic to the Gospel proclamation itself, then the issues in the following texts are as well. That is, if we accept baptism as a part of the Gospel message, then we must accept casting out devils, speaking in tongues, handling serpents, drinking poison without being hurt, and healing the sick by laying on hands. Mark 16:17-18. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly

thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” There are episodes described in the four Gospels and in the Book of Acts which describe all of these events as taking place. But they are not essentially and intrinsically the message of the Gospel. The Gospel is not the good news that people will start picking up snakes.

The context of the preaching of the Gospel is described with colourful detail, but the actual content of the message is given only briefly and rarely. Nevertheless, an occasional word can shed light on the nature of the Gospel message. Such is found in Acts 20:24 “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Here the sentence ends with what could be stated in ordinary speech as “the good news of the gift of God.” This text does not tell what that gift is. If we ponder it in the light of Mark 1:15, it suggests that the gift of God is the replacement of human despotism with the rule of God. But the text does not state this.

It is significant that the Gospels and the Book of Acts do not give direct information on what the Gospel is except in Mark 1:15. We are completely dependent on that one text to know what the Gospel is. At this point we turn to the epistles. There is only one relevant text in the epistles written by a man who actually knew and heard Jesus (as) proclaiming the Gospel. That is 1 Peter 1:25 “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” The enlightening bit of information given here is that the Gospel is preached or proclaimed by means of the “word of the Lord.” In the context, the word of the Lord can only refer to the Hebrew Scriptures, and to nothing else. At this point we are justified in affirming that the Gospel is the message that God is sovereign, that is, that allegiance and obedience are due to Him, even in so despotic a society as the Roman empire, and that this message is proclaimed by the use of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Having got a clear idea from those witnesses of the Gospel who claim to have heard it directly from the mouth of Jesus (as), we can now turn to the epistles of Paul. The writings of St. Paul, according to St. Peter, are difficult to understand. Furthermore, he is not a direct witness. Rather, he claims to be a witness on the basis of a vision long after the disappearance of Jesus (as). He never knew Jesus (as) personally. He claimed to have met Jesus (as) on the road to

Damascus, and on the basis of that visionary experience, he made several assumptions. First of all, it is clear that he assumed that Jesus (as) had been killed. He had this merely on hearsay. He was not there to see it happen, and cannot therefore be a valid witness of the fact. Secondly, having seen Jesus (as) in vision, he assumed that he had been resurrected from the dead. St. Paul had belonged to the sect of Pharisees, who were criticized by the Saducees among the Jews for believing in the resurrection from the dead. Paul latched on to this visionary experience to begin to proclaim the resurrection. He went around stirring up controversy among Jews over the question of the resurrection and for this he was finally imprisoned and sent to Rome for trial. St. Paul's proclamation of the Gospel is submerged in this course of events in his personal life, and in the matrix of Jewish sectarian debate. The story is found not only in his epistles, especially the beginning of Galatians, but also in the last half of the Book of Acts.

The first text of relevance is Romans 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.)" At this point Paul's concept of the Gospel overlaps completely with what we have seen among the eye-witnesses. But Paul goes on to add his own cogitations and understanding of the Gospel in verses three and four. "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:" What he says here may very well be true, but it is an addition determined by his personal experience, and not a part of the Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus (as) and his eye-witness apostles. It is missing in Mark 1:15, the only expression of the content of the Gospel to be found overtly stated by the evangelists. It has more to do with Paul's confrontation with the Saducees about the resurrection than it does with what we find Jesus (as) actually saying in Mark 1:15. St. Paul repeats this allegation on one other occasion. 2 Timothy 2:8 "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel." Here he admits that this clause is a part of "my" Gospel, not necessarily a part of the original.

Now whether or not we can accept what Paul says about the resurrection as true, there is one thing that is of primary importance. What is the result or response of Paul's Gospel? It is found in verse 5 "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to



the faith among all nations, for his name.” Paul’s Son of God and resurrection theme, arising from his sectarian experience as a Jew, is a parenthesis which does not effect the core of his Gospel. He has clearly repeated the apostolic Gospel in verses one and two, which is the proclamation of the sovereignty of God even in the Roman empire. The result of that proclamation, even after Paul’s discursus into Jewish sectarian conflict is still the same as that of the other apostles: grace for obedience to the faith. St. Paul, despite his personal distraction and despite not being a direct eye-witness to the proclamation of the Gospel, still preserves the apostolic proclamation of the sovereignty of God and the good news of grace for obedience even under Rome.

Paul’s input is truly illuminating. In Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” He gives us two new pieces of information here. The first is that the Gospel contains power. That is, it is not merely the proclamation that people ought and must obey God rather than Caesar no matter what the consequences. It is also a gift of power, that is, the possibility to put into practice obedience to God despite the human institutions which oppose it. Thank God for Paul, for it is only at this point that we can see why the Gospel is actually good news. News of the duty of civil disobedience is not good news unless there is a guarantee that it can be more or less successfully carried out. St. Paul reiterates this in Romans 16:25 “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.” St. Paul returns to this subject in another epistle 1 Thessalonians 1:5 “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” The second bit of information is that the kingdom of God, that is, submission to the sovereignty of God, is not for Jews only, but for others as well. The kingdom of God is at least as universal as the Roman empire.

In the next Pauline text there is another new bit of information. Romans 2:16 “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” Here Paul does not go into the detail of what he sees as Jesus’s (as) role in judgment, but he does point out that a proclamation of the judgment of God is a part of the Gospel which he preaches. This was implicit in Jesus’s (as)

proclamation in Mark 1:15, but not stated. The sovereignty of God implies the duty of obedience, and the duty of obedience implies accountability. Paul is thus consistent in the application of the primitive Gospel.

In another Pauline epistle we find Paul affirming the distinction we made between baptism and the Gospel on the basis of Mark 16. 1 Corinthians 1:17 “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” He does not go into detail here on what he means by the cross of Christ. The point he is trying to make, however, has to do with the rhetorical principles he finds most effective in preaching the Gospel. He does not rely on wisdom of words. This may be a reference to Hellenistic philosophy. If so, this may be an indication of agreement with Peter, that the Gospel is to be preached through the medium of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel, as we have seen, is characterized by two things. First, he is highly personal, mixing his Jewish sectarian conflicts into his proclamation. Second, he is deeply astute in bringing out the very real implications of the Gospel in terms of divine power and judgment. This could only put him in a position in which he was misunderstood by some and definitely in conflict with others. Much in the Book of Acts and the Pauline epistles bears this out. One indication is his reference to multiple gospels in Galatians 1:6-9 “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Paul indeed found areas of confrontation, and this was inevitable. It is not certain, however, that there were real disagreements at that point among the followers of Jesus (as) on the content of the Gospel.

Paul follows this tirade with a description of his visionary experience. Strangely enough, he appeals to the visionary experience as a better guarantee of validity than eye-witness report. Galatians 1:11; 2:1-2 “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the

Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.”

There is a text to follow which is susceptible to misunderstanding. Galatians 2:7 “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter.” The careless reader may think that this refers to the two gospels noted earlier, and that one of the gospels included the rite of circumcision and the other rejected it. That is not the import of the sentence. Rather, it merely divides the territory of proclamation. Peter is given the proclamation to Jewish people, and Paul is sent with the good news to non-Jewish people. The messages are ostensibly the same.

Paul, being sent to the non-Jews, is more fully aware than others of the universal character of the Gospel message. He thus gives an interesting bit of information about the very content of the Gospel. The Gospel includes the message that all nations will be blessed in Abraham (as). Galatians 3:8 “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” The idea is that, rather than God’s kingdom being limited to Jews, it is promised from the beginning to be on the basis of the faith of Abraham (as), and for all nations. Again, thank God for St. Paul. This information would otherwise have been missing from the New Testament. It constitutes a reaffirmation that the Gospel is a recalling to the faith of Abraham (as) and is for all nations. St. Paul affirms this universality in Ephesians 3:6 “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

St. Paul mentions the word Gospel again in Ephesians 1:13 “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” This text is less rich in information than in promise. Paul here enlarges upon the theme of power to accomplish the Gospel in the use of the words “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” This expression no doubt reflects St. Paul’s awareness of the very real and practical difficulties of obedience to God in a despotic regime. He also affirms Peter’s statement that the Gospel is to be proclaimed by the medium of the Hebrew Scriptures or the “word of truth.”

Much has been made in some circles about the Gospel being the good news of salvation without good works, or the works of the

law. Much of the discussion is based on the expressions of St. Paul. The subject is far too complex to discuss here, but it is clear that Paul does not envision a salvation without good works. The first reason is a logical one. Paul's concept of the Gospel does not depart from that of the apostles, and he more clearly than any other introduces the accountability of judgment in the Gospel itself. The second reason is that Paul actually states in connection with the Gospel, that right behaviour is necessary. Behaviour is what the old word "conversation" means as used in the following text. Philippians 1:27 "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

St. Paul refers to judgment in connection with the Gospel in a very positive sense in Colossians 1:5 "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." This hope is reiterated in Colossians 1:23 "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." Here Paul repeats the Abrahamic universality.

This contrast of hope and damnation, so reminiscent not only of Jesus's (as) words on many occasions but of the many similar expressions in the Qur'an, comes up again and again in the brief, early epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thessalonians 2:14 "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is probably in this context of judgment that we should read St. Paul's words to Timothy. 2 Timothy 1:10 "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Paul has noted the role of Jesus (as) in the judgment without defining it in the context of the Gospel as such. His expressions here apparently mean that Jesus (as) in mediating the Gospel to humankind, played a key role in abolishing death and bringing life and immortality in the context of the judgment.

We have noted how St. Paul was an ambiguous character. For the most part he illuminated the expression of the Gospel which had

been left far from clear in other parts of the New Testament. Yet, not being an eye-witness, he was also more impressed with events outside the life and teaching of the real, historical Jesus, and this left a mark on his understanding. We can now go back to the two remaining passages written or reported by people who knew Jesus (as) personally.

Jesus (as) makes a reference to the Gospel in an extended passage in Matthew 24:4-28. The passage is an answer to a question about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. He prophesies that the Gospel should be preached to the whole world, and reiterates that the Gospel is “of the kingdom”, that is, relating to the message of God’s sovereignty. Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

The truly defining text on the Gospel does not appear until the end of the book, as though the New Testament writers were holding this big secret until the end. The final mention of the word *to evangelion*, “the Gospel” is found in Revelation 14:6-7 “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” Although much information has been gleaned about the Gospel from the New Testament texts, only this one along with Mark 1:15 actually gives anything like a comprehensive view of the content of the Gospel message. It is interesting to note that this is the only text that gives real detail about the content. It is just as interesting to see that there is not the slightest mention or reference to the proclamation of a vicarious sacrifice for sin on a cross or anywhere else. That message, true or not, is not a part of the New Testament Gospel. If it is a part of any gospel, it must be a part of one of those other gospels St. Paul referred to as being accurst.

First of all, this Gospel is termed the eternal Gospel. It is stripped of any local aspects that might have been attached to the Gospel as reported by the evangelists and apostles about Jesus’s (as) time. This definition of the Gospel is at the heart of the Apocalypse of St. John, a book that has baffled commentators for centuries and been the subject of the most varied interpretations of its obscure symbols and cryptic expressions. But these two verses are as clear, understandable, and bereft of any vestige of obscure symbolism as is

possible. The real, true, eternal Gospel is expressed here in one brief verse which cannot be misunderstood by any human being who has acquired the capacity to use human language. The Gospel of Revelation 14:7, the only expression of the Gospel that exists in the Bible besides Mark 1:15, and the only detailed expression of the Gospel to be found in the Bible, contains three brief commands: fear God, give glory to God, and worship God.

These commands may seem somewhat imprecise at first glance. However, they contain some rather precise implications. The fear of God does not refer to terror or horror. Rather, it refers to those influences which we experience as exterior to ourselves but which determine our behaviour and choices. These influences are those of authority and those of peers. By accommodating our behaviour to the demands of ungodly government and ungodly neighbours, we relinquish the fear of God. On the contrary, by taking the divine opinion into consideration instead of the opinion of peers, we can acknowledge divine law. This is what is meant by fearing God. To fear God is to recognize the very principles expressed in the Gospel as found in Mark 1:15.

The meaning of giving God glory is somewhat easier to grasp without explanation. It means quite literally to include as a central part of the liturgical act to glorify God verbally in an expression such as *subhan Allah*, glory to God. It has a meaning in terms of attitude, however, as well. Just as human institutions and individuals can steal the fear of God by demanding conformity, they can steal the glory of God by demanding recognition and credit. To give God glory implies recognizing God as the source of all good things. For this reason many people answer expressions of gratitude by saying "Thanks be to God."

The third imperative is *proskyneese*, which is translated "worship." The actual meaning of the Greek word, however, is to fall down in prostration. It is reliance on another gospel to suggest that mental recognition of God's authority relieves us of the responsibility to carry out what many might consider mere forms of no intrinsic value. Whether or not there is intrinsic value in the formal gestures of prayer, there is most certainly intrinsic value in the obedience which carrying them out entails. Of the three commands included in the Biblical definition of the Gospel, and there are only three, one is the command to pray in prostration. Any concept of the Gospel that ignores the practice of prayer in prostration is a non-Biblical one. There are so few defining expressions of the Gospel in the Bible that it

is impossible to ignore any of them and remain within a Biblical framework.

Besides the three imperatives that make up the Gospel, there is an explanatory phrase for why we should fear God and give God glory. The explanation is that we are facing judgement. This explanation is the logical one for the first two imperatives. The realization of impending judgment should have the power to free us from peer pressure and reliance on human authorities. In a similar way, and more positively, the fact that God is our judge should encourage us to remember to give God recognition and credit for all good things.

Finally, there is an explanatory phrase for the third imperative, again one which is supremely logical in view of the command to pray in prostration. The explanation is simply that God has created all things. This is the one great defining aspect separating God from all other things. There is only one Creator and all other things are His creations. This is the Gospel definition of God, which is no definition in terms of limitation at all, but the recognition that as Creator and Sovereign, He cannot be defined or limited by any created thing.

A careful review of the Biblical references to the Gospel dispels the first impression that the New Testament fails to give a clear exposition of its character and content. Although the texts that are truly defining are few in number, they are clear and unequivocal. The Gospel is simply a call to recognize God alone as Creator and Sovereign Judge, and to order our behaviour in view of that realization, without reference to creed, priest, church or sacraments. There is another word for religion that consists in the submission of the individual to God. That word is Islam.

## Lecture Eight: The Word Muhammad in the Bible

This brief study seeks to answer the simple question of whether or not the Hebrew Bible refers to the word Muhammad, or more specifically to one of its Hebrew cognates, as a proper name. The usefulness of such a task is clear. If such a usage can be attested, the many descriptive passages that some scholars have appealed to in reference either to the prophet or the Mahdi of that name (upon whom be peace) gain in validity.

The larger problem set forth behind this study is whether the Bible contains material in reference to the figures of the prophet or the Mahdi (as) in Islamic thought. Obviously the Bible has been interpreted in specific ways by Jewish, Christian and other scholars in reference to the Messiah, Elijah, or another awaited prophet, and these traditional ways of applying the Scriptures may conflict with Islamic interpretations related to the prophet or Mahdi (as). This is especially likely to be the case, since many of the possible candidates are passages already understood in Messianic terms. Jewish and Christian understanding differs, sometimes applying a passage to the awaited Messiah on one hand and to Jesus (as) on the other. To attempt to bring a further figure into this complex adds to the confusion. It is therefore essential to approach the matter systematically.

The first step in approaching this problem ought not to be to propose such new interpretations of old and controversial texts. That task should be relegated to a later stage altogether. Rather, the first step is to note whether the names of the prophet and Mahdi are used in the Hebrew Scriptures in some cognate form, and whether these are associated with factors suggesting the Islamic figures as the terminus of such prophetic expressions. The second step is to examine the functions of the Prophet (as) and the Mahdi (as) in comparison with the body of Biblical Scripture in order to identify parallels. Obviously such parallels will be more convincing to the skeptic once a clear reference to a specific name can be produced.

Among the many names of the Prophet (as) and the Mahdi (as) is of course Muhammad. This is the name most likely to be evident in



the Bible, and must therefore be examined first. On the other hand, this name is ambiguous, since it refers not only to the Prophet (as) and the Mahdi (as), but to other Imams as well. It will thus be necessary in this study to find a Hebrew cognate, show that it is used as a specific name, and find factors that point directly to the Prophet (as) and the Mahdi (as). Unless this can be achieved, further examination of the Bible will be largely fruitless in regard to this subject. Without a demonstration that this name has significance among the prophecies of prophets to come and the end-time, functional descriptions, the application of texts already applied to other messianic figures, will continue to have little force outside Islam.

The Hebrew cognate of the root from which the name Muhammad is derived is hmd, which means “to desire, pamper.” The Arabic connotation of “to praise” seems not to be found in Hebrew. The noun form is a feminine with the common feminine suffix added. It is used twelve times in the Hebrew Scriptures, four of which appear in the construct. There is no problem with the use of this word as a masculine proper name, as there are many examples of seemingly feminine forms being included in a masculine name, and vice versa.

The first task is to establish whether or not this word is used as a proper name in the Hebrew Scriptures. We can immediately dispense with the occurrence of the word in the construct in Daniel 11:37, where it is translated “the desire” of women. It is clearly and unequivocally used as a proper name in Psalm 106:24. Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word.

By leaving the word untranslated, we get the following rendering of the verse. Yea, they despised the land of Hamda, they believed not his word. The final half of the verse includes the possessive suffix “his,” which needs an antecedent. The nearest possible antecedent is the enigmatic Hamda. Unless this word is conceived as a masculine proper name, there is no natural antecedent for the possessive. The fact that Hamda is the only possible antecedent for the masculine possessive that follows shows that it must be seen as a masculine proper noun rather than a feminine common noun.

It remains to understand to whom this verse refers. Seen in terms of the Islamic concept of the Mahdi (as), the verse makes little sense. On the other hand, seen in terms of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (as), it makes a good deal of sense. It can easily be understood as referring to the fact that when the prophet Muhammad

(as) came, many people did not believe his word, because they despised his origins in Arabia.

Of course it might be objected that the subject of the context is that of the Exodus, or rather more specifically, the projected entrance into Canaan by Israel fleeing Egypt. The primary application of the verse ought logically to refer to a figure in that time and place, especially since the tense of the verb is perfective. However, there is no local figure to which this sentence might apply. The sentence is typically a prophetic utterance rising out of its local context. Finally, the tense does not necessarily refer to the past, as there are many examples of clearly future expressions using the tense, especially in prophecy. Even if a local, primary application could be found, the secondary application of the prophecy would clearly refer to the Prophet (as), just as Jews and Christians interpret many passages to refer to the Messiah in a secondary application despite the fact that there is a clear primary application in the situation of the time when the prophecy was given.

It is clear that the word Hamda is used at least once in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to a human being, and that reference contains a significant parallel to the life of the prophet Muhammad (as). It remains to be seen whether there are other references to the word Hamda that can or must be seen as a proper name, and whether any of these refer either to the prophet Muhammad (as) or to Muhammad al-Mahdi (as).

There is an ambiguous reference to the death of Jehoram in 2 Chronicles 21:20 that applies the word Hamda to the king. 2 Chronicles 21:20 ‘Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.’ The word Hamda is translated here as “desired.” This translation is slightly distorted, since the noun substantive is used without an adjectival positioning. However, the translation is certainly possible. If the word is meant to be a proper name, the relevance is great. The implication would be that at the time every king of Judah was evaluated as to whether he fitted the criteria of the awaited Hamda. The name itself suggests this awaiting, that the people knew that Hamda was coming and longed for or desired him. The king is buried with the nostalgic remark that he did not turn out to be Hamda. In this case there is no contextual evidence pointing out whether the prophet (as) or the Mahdi (as) is meant.

An occurrence of the word in the construct in the same sense, in reference to the anointing of Saul as king, is found in 1 Samuel 9:20. Here the king is called the desire or Hamda of Israel. The expression is put to Saul in a future sense, thus showing it to be in the context of a messianic hope.

Another appearance of the word comes in 2 Chronicles 32:27 ‘And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels.’

The translation of “pleasant” is a little forced here, but possible despite its slightly enigmatic character. The translation of keley as “jewels” is rather interpretive, since the word has a broad range of meanings more clearly related to utensils and tools. Coming after “shields,” another translation would appear in order. It is possible that there was at the time an expression “instruments of Hamda” which had a meaning not now known, but referred to the awaited and desired one. That this is the case is suggested by the repetition of the expression in Jeremiah 25:34 Howl, ye shepherds, and cry, and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished, and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel.

The same expression appears, this time translated vessel instead of jewels. It could just as well be understood as “instruments of Hamda.” That this is a technical term the meaning of which has been lost is clouded by the fact that it is arbitrarily translated with a different expression nearly every time it occurs. A similar usage for the word in the construct, and in reference to the vessels of the temple, is found in 2 Chronicles 36:10. Another example is Nahum 2:9 ‘Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.’ The exact word keley, which was “jewels” and “vessel” before, is arbitrarily ‘furniture’ here. There is finally a second verse in which the expression is translated ‘pleasant vessels.’ Hosea 13:15 Thou he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

The fact that fully half of the passages containing the term Hamda pair it with keley goes far toward confirming the theory that this is a lexicalized expression. Whatever ‘instruments of Hamda’ are,

they make it clear that Hamda was a figure that was desired and awaited and had captured the minds of the populace to such an extent that the name appeared as an expression referring to some kind of instruments, whether the unlikely jewels or vessels or furniture of some kind, or something else, is meant.

Another idiom, less relevant to the present question, uses the plural of the word, hamdoth. It is translated several ways, but generally means ‘desired, precious, beloved.’ It appears in 2 Chronicles 20:25 with *keley*, referring perhaps to precious stones. Perhaps the use of the plural distinguishes it from the idiomatic expression in the singular examined above. It occurs with other words in Daniel 10:10,11,19; 11:43.

We have seen that one passage (Psalm 106:24) demands the interpretation of Hamda as a proper name. 2 Chronicles 21:20 permits the interpretation of Hamda as a proper name, but does not require it grammatically. It may require it semantically. If so, it and like references intimate a prophetic expectation attached to kings. The other passages suggest a technical term inspired by the hold this awaited one had on the popular imagination. The remaining two passages are in the same category as 2 Chronicles 21:20, which could be translated as a proper name or as a common noun, although their semantic weight falls on the side of a proper name as well.

The following text using the word Hamda is Jeremiah 3:19 ‘But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee the land of Hamda, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.’

These words are addressed to the people of Judah. Because of their behaviour, God asks how He can count them as sons and allow them to live in the land of Hamda. He answers that He can do so if they acknowledge Him as father and if they do not turn away from Him, that is, if they repent. The context is that of impending deportation, which does in fact take place, since the people do not repent. The figure of speech, sons and father, in relation to God implies a relationship of obedience, as a child to its father. This is the required relationship between God and humankind. Humankind is obliged to obey God or suffer the consequences. The Jews of the time, through failure to obey God, were deported to Babylon first and finally under protest from Jeremiah, to Egypt. Thus they lost the right to live in the land of Hamda and take their place among the sons of God, that is, those obedient to Him. The context makes it clear that the land of

Hamda is the land promised to Abraham (as) and his descendants. The fact that the expression parallels that of Psalm 106:24 might lead us to consider this also to be a proper name, although the context here does not require it.

Does this text have any eschatological implications, that is, can it be applied to the figure of the Mahdi? The text clearly applies primarily to the time of the prophet Jeremiah (as). The reaction of Judah to Jeremiah's prophecy was failure to repent with the result of deportation. The final portion of the text seems to indicate that the Jews would respond by repenting, which we see that they did not do at the time of Jeremiah. There is therefore every reason to give the text an eschatological application. Applied in an eschatological way, the implication is that the Jews are given a chance to repent and thus take their place among the nations who are obedient to God. This is consonant with the eschatological hope and the figure of the Mahdi, who should fill the earth with justice. In this sense, the land of Hamda must be the whole earth to be inhabited by those who respond with repentance to the call of the Mahdi (as), here referred to by his primary name of Muhammad or Hamda.

The reference to the land of Hamda has an eschatological application here. This means that we may justified in attributing an eschatological application to Psalm 106:24 as well, since the expression is the same. Psalm 106:24, which is the vital text to show that Hamda is a personal masculine name in the Hebrew Scriptures, ought then to have a dual application, that is, to both the prophet Muhammad (as) and the Mahdi (as).

The land of Hamda is also mentioned in Zechariah 7:14 'But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they had laid desolate the land of Hamda.'

This text seems to refer to the diaspora of the Jews among all nations. The last half of the text is enigmatic and suggestive. The first desolation of the land is the desolation of having lost its population. That no man passed through nor returned refers specifically that no Jews were living or travelling there. The last clause is introduced with the Hebrew copula *we-*, but the authorized translator interprets it correctly as an explanatory attachment, giving the cause of what went before. The Jews had not laid any physical land desolate. 'Laying the land of Hamda desolate' must be understood in a figurative sense. To

give a literal sense to this clause would be redundancy on the level of saying that water is wet because it is wet.

The expression 'land of Hamda' is used three times in Scripture, which is a great proportion of the whole corpus. It has almost as great a claim to lexicalization as the expression "instruments of Hamda." But its meaning is far clearer. Several levels of meaning appear. The bottom layer is a reference to the land promised to Abraham (as) in Genesis 12:1-3. The promise that in Abraham (as) all families of the earth should be blessed already at the beginning takes on an eschatological perspective that has not gone unnoticed by non-Muslim scholars. The 'land of Hamda' is the heritage of Abraham (as) in its eschatological sense. Laying the land of Hamda desolate implies spoiling the covenant of Abraham, that is, basically introducing injustice. The prophets are clear in their denouncing of Israel for injustice to the weak, and this is one of the foundations for the exile. This is repeated for the diaspora, as prophesied by Zechariah (as).

All of this affirms the application of the expression 'land of Hamda' in an eschatological sense and by the same token to the figure of the Mahdi (as).

In sum, all of the texts are potentially examples of the use of the word Hamda as a masculine personal name. One of these, Psalm 106:24, requires this interpretation, and the others, within their context, are best understood by appeal to this usage. Thus the Biblical usage of this word can be seen to be uniform and consistent. Psalm 106:24 is also unique in that it must be applied primarily to the prophet Muhammad (as). Its eschatological implications are dependent on the lexicalization of the expression 'land of Hamda.' A dual application may be seen in all of the other texts as well, although most of them show a clear reference to eschatology, and by implication the possibility of perceiving in them a reference to the Mahdi (as).

There is an occurrence of the word Hamda in the construct in Haggai 2:7ff 'And I will shake all nations, and the Hamda of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give Islam [shalom], saith the LORD of hosts.'

This particular usage, with the construct, speaks against interpreting the word Hamda in this case as a proper name. However, the text is late, and the lexicalized expressions might have become so

ingrained that the proper name had become synonymous with an awaited figure. Perhaps a middle ground translation of the term would best express the meaning of the text: 'the desired one of all nations.' The reconstructed temple did not last to see a messianic figure at all. It was desecrated, reconsecrated, and renovated beyond recognition by Herod. So neither Jesus (as) nor Muhammad the prophet (as) could fulfill literally the first promise. A literal fulfilment would have to be sought in the Maccabean period. Given the vocabulary, the night ascent of Muhammad (as) is as good a fulfilment of this prophecy as any history has to offer. The translation of shalom as Islam rather than the generalized term "peace" is predicated on the tone of the sentence, which is specific. The grace of a particular event is implied.

There is a single occurrence of an interesting form of the word including the participial prefix as in Arabic, and what appears to be a plural suffix in form. This is mahamadim in Song of Solomon 5:16. This cannot be a plural, however, since the referent is clearly stated to be masculine singular in the preceding words. The whole passage is impressive. Song of Solomon 5:10 My beloved *is* white and ruddy, Chief among ten thousand. 11 His head *is like* the finest gold; His locks *are* wavy, *And* black as a raven. 12 His eyes *are* like doves By the rivers of waters, Washed with milk, *And* fitly set. 13 His cheeks *are* like a bed of spices, Banks of scented herbs. His lips *are* lilies, Dripping liquid myrrh. 14 His hands *are* rods of gold Set with beryl. His body *is* carved ivory Inlaid *with* sapphires. 15 His legs *are* pillars of marble Set on bases of fine gold. His countenance *is* like Lebanon, Excellent as the cedars. 16 His mouth *is* most sweet, Yes, he *is* indeed Muhammad. This *is* my beloved, And this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!

At this point it may seem surprising to what extent these texts actually express details in the ministries of the prophet Muhammad (as) and the Mahdi (as). However detailed these references may be, an examination of the texts referring not to the primary name, but to other epithets and their surrounding ideas, is likely to show an array of detail of convincing proportions, especially considering that the word Hamda is used as a proper name with eschatological connotations.

## Lecture Nine: The Word ‘Ali in the Bible

The word ‘ali is used 226 times in the Hebrew scriptures. The following study examines all of these occurrences at least briefly. The Massoretic text of the Hebrew Bible is the source, but I have ignored the Massoretic pointing of the word ‘ali, rather examining each context for clues to which pointing and consequently which meaning of the word is to be preferred.

Most of the time the word ‘ali is a preposition, either with or without the first person singular pronominal suffix. The first occurrence with the pronominal suffix is in Genesis 20:9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. The following texts, the great preponderance of passages including the word ‘ali, seem to have the same meaning, that is, “upon me” or something similar. Genesis 27:12; 13; 30:28; 33:13; 34:12; 34:30; 42:36; 48:7; 50:20, Numbers 11:11; 14:35; 22:30; Judges 7:2; 19:20; 20:5; 1 Samuel 17:35; 21:15; 22:8,13; 23:21; 2 Samuel 1:9; 3:8; 14:9; 15:33; 19:38; 1 Kings 2:4; 14:2; 22:8,18; 2 Kings 16:7; 18:14; 1 Chronicles 22:8; 2 Chronicles 18:7; 18:17; 36:23; Ezra 1:2; 7:28; Nehemiah 2:8; 2:18; 6:12; 13:22; Esther 4:16; Job 7:12; 7:20; 9:11; 10:1; 13:13,26; 16:9,10,13,14,15; 19:5,6; 19:11; 19:12; 21:27; 29:13; 30:1,12,15,16; 31:38; 33:10; Psalm 3:1(2); 3:6(7); 13:2(3); 13:6(7); 16:6; 17:9; 22:13; 27:2,3; 31:13; 32:4,5; 35:15; 35:21; 35:16,26; 38:2(3); 38:16(17); 40:7,12; 41:7; 41:9(10); 41:11; 42:4(5); 42:5(6); 42:7(8); 42:11(12); 43:5; 54:3(5); 55:3(4); 55:4(5); 55:12(13); 56:5(6); 59:3(4); 60:8; 69:9(10); 69:15(16); 86:14; 88:7(8); 88:16(17); 88:17(18); 92:11(12); 109:2; 109:5; 116:12; 119:69; 139:5; 142:7(8); 143:4; Proverbs 7:14; Ecclesiastes 2:17; Song of Solomon 2:4; Isaiah 1:14; 61:1; Jeremiah 8:18; 11:19; 12:8,11; 15:16; 18:23; 49:11; Lamentations 1:15; 3:5,20,61,62; Ezekiel 3:22; 8:1; 11:5; 35:13; 37:1; 40:1; Daniel 4:34; 4:36; 7:28; 10:8; 10:16; Hosea 7:13; Hosea 11:8; Joel 3(4):4; Jonah 2:3(4); 2:7(8); and Malachi 3:13.

The first occurrence of the word as a preposition without suffix is in Genesis 49:17, which is a poetic passage. Indeed, the form is



typical of poetic style. Genesis 49:17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. Similarly the word appears to be used as a simple preposition without suffix in Genesis 49:22; Deuteronomy 32:2; Job 6:5; 8:9; 9:26; 15:27; 18:10; 20:4; 29:3,4; 30:4; 33:15; 36:28; 38:24; 41:30; Psalm 49:11; 50:5,16; 92:3(4); 94:20; 108:9(10); 131:2; 142:3(4); Proverbs 8:2; 30:19; Isaiah 18:4; Lamentations 4:5; and Micah 5:(6)7.

In 1 Samuel 1-4 is found the story of the house of Eli. The name is also mentioned in 1 Samuel 14:3; 1 Kings 2:27; This proper name of the high priest and judge of Israel before Samuel is written <sup>°</sup>Ali. The pointing with the long e merely reflects the more complex vowel system of Hebrew as compared to Arabic. Arabic cognates with a appear in Hebrew with either a or e, and often preferably e. The segholate character of Hebrew thus clouds the fact that the name is precisely the same as the Arabic <sup>°</sup> Ali. There are some striking parallels as well as direct contrasts between the Biblical Eli and Imam <sup>°</sup>Ali (as). The first <sup>°</sup>Ali had two unrighteous sons who led the people into disaster. The second one had two sons who became righteous leaders. There is a parallel between the two figures from a historical perspective as well. The Samaritans claim that Eli caused the rift between Samaritans and Jews by his false claim to the priesthood. The division between Shi'ite and Sunnite Islam surrounds the claims of the figure of Imam <sup>°</sup>Ali (as).

The first clear passage in which the word must be translated as the imperative singular of the verb "to go up" is in 1 Samuel 25:35 So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person. Similarly the word occurs in Isaiah 21:2; 40:9; Jeremiah 22:20; and 46:11.

The word appears with the meaning of "leaves of" in Nehemiah 8:15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

The first text that requires reevaluation is Exodus 8:(5)9.

And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only?

It is not likely that anyone would pretend that the phrase “glory over me” makes any sense at all. The assumption of the translator is that the word here is the preposition with the pronominal suffix, which is of course the dominant usage of the word in the Torah, especially in the prose passages. There seems to be no questioning of the preposition and suffix themselves, while the hesitancy about how to understand the verb placed with the preposition and suffix is of longstanding debate, going back to the Septuagint (LXX) underlying the Vulgata expression *constitue mihi*, appoint me (a time). Reference to the Massoretic text has led most translators to reject the Septuagint and Vulgata alternative for something presumably based on the Hebrew text, whether or not it makes sense.

Those translators requiring meaning in their translation have tended to read an unwarranted expression into the Hebrew in the sense of “do me the honor to...” an interpretation that goes back at least to Luther. Wavering between sense and nonsense is illustrated by the Webster original, which was “Glory over me” and the revised Webster which is “Command me,” apparently accepting the LXX over the Masoretic text. In sum, three alternatives are to be found in the more commonly known translations. The first follows the LXX-Vulgata tradition. The second tries to make sense of the Hebrew Massoretic text by attributing unattested meanings to the preceding verb. The third translates the Massoretic verb correctly, producing nonsense in the word <sup>c</sup>ali by insisting that it is a preposition with suffix.

An alternative is to accept the Massoretic verb as it stands and attribute a non-prepositional meaning to the word <sup>c</sup>ly. The choices are one of the verb forms “to rise,” or one of the proper or common noun meanings. The position requires the latter, rather than the imperative verb. The choices are thus basically “glorify my leaf,” “glorify a pestle or pistil” or “glorify <sup>c</sup>Ali.” The common nouns do not make sense, and the second meaning is not even attested in Scriptural Hebrew. An Arab will immediately suggest a reference to the Deity, as “exalted.” This word, however, in the Hebrew text, would consist in an Arabicism. We are thus left with the enigmatic “glorify <sup>c</sup>Ali,” in reference to an unknown named figure, or reference to God under the term, something that appears to be more or less without precedent in Biblical Hebrew. The reflexive sense of the verb could be thought to imply the necessity of a preposition before the object. However, the lack of the preposition is almost the rule in poetic passages, and is not lacking in the Torah as well. Thus these two alternatives are otherwise perfectly feasible.

The rest of the texts must be examined in the light to two questions. The first is whether or not the word should be translated as one of the common alternatives noted above (as a preposition, a preposition with the suffix, the verb imperative, or as “leaves of” or “pestle.”). Once these meanings are eliminated, we are left with the alternatives of Exodus 8:(5)9. The second task is to determine whether the text refers to Imam Ali (as) or some other figure.

There is nothing in Exodus 8:(5)9 to indicate whether a human or divine figure is meant. The Muslim reader will immediately doubt whether the word is an epithet of God, since it is generally used so in the holy Qur’an. The translators of the Bible, however, have generally neglected that possibility, probably from hesitance to impose an Arabicism on the Biblical Hebrew text rather than bias. We can only hope to answer the question by an examination of all of the texts. Failing that, recourse to extra-biblical sources will be necessary

Such texts as Numbers 11:13 and 14:27 could conceivably be translated ‘Ali as well as a form of interjection, something on the order of “ya Ali!” Numbers 11:13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

Numbers 14:27 How long (shall I bear with) this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. The second occurrence, however, in Numbers 14:27 can only be translated as in the Authorized Version. Even without this evidence, however, the structure of the sentences makes the authorized translation preferable.

The structure of Numbers 14:29 is neutral, and would actually as such allow the translation with ‘Ali as easily as “against me.” The witness of verse 27, however, speaks against ‘Ali as the better alternative. Numbers 14:29 Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me.

Numbers 21:17 is the second text that translators have been willing to leave in a form void of meaning, in the figure of the flying well. It is doubly troublesome in lacking an explanatory context.

Numbers 21:17 Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it. The authorized translator writes words more appropriate to Alice in Wonderland than to scriptural translation. Most others do little better. Douay, Darby, The Jewish Publication Society Bible, The Twenty-first Century King James, Green’s Literal

Translation, The Modern King James Version, The New King James Version, la Bible nouvelle edition de Geneve, the Webster and most other are satisfied with this interpretation. The Bible in Basic English tries to avoid the problem of the flying well by replacing it with the obedient well that comes when called: Then Israel gave voice to this song: Come up, O water-spring, let us make a song to it. Other translators have recognized the problem and tried to make sense of it by referring to the springing up of the water from a fountain. Among these are Finnish translation of 1938, the Swedish translation of 1917, and la nuova Diodati 1991. These are roughly “surge out, o well!” English translators are willing to depend on the ambiguity of the word “spring” in English. A few translators assume a preposition between the verb and the noun, thus making the noun the direction of movement rather than the vocative. This relieves us of the rather forced speech to a well. Among these are the redivierte Schlachter Bibel 1951 Da sang Israel dieses Lied: «Kommt zum Brunnen! Singt von ihm! It is rare to find help from the LXX in this dilemma, but perhaps Luther’s original is such an example Da sang Israel dieses Lied, und sangen umeinander über dem Brunnen. The translators in the revision of Luther have succumbed to the general fascination with nonsense. Even the Vulgata is surprisingly interpretive with the LXX with tunc cecinit Israhel carmen istud ascendat puteus concinebant. Young makes a novel contribution by rejecting the Masoretic pointing of the word, thus changing it from an imperative to the preposition. (Young’s literal translation. Then singeth Israel this song, concerning the well--they have answered to it. In so doing, Young is the only translator to write a grammatically sensible translation. However, by doing so, he suppresses the song itself, thus raising the issue of what “this” can possibly refer to. In sum, almost every possible configuration has been tried. The implication is that no translator actually knows what the verse means.

There is a construction that is completely normal and understandable in Hebrew, whereby <sup>c</sup>Ali is the subject and the well the predicate: <sup>c</sup>Ali is a well. It is not clear, however, to whom this proper name refers.

It is possible, but not necessary, to translate <sup>c</sup>Ali as a proper name in Numbers 24:6.

The Authorized Version is As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. All

translators seem to accept the interpretation “by the river.” Furthermore, it parallels what follows, “beside the waters.” Semantically and syntactically there seems to be no better alternative. If one understands <sup>°</sup>Ali as a proper name here, the translation might read (following the Authorized Version otherwise): Ali is like the valleys that spread forth, like gardens, a river: as the trees... No linguistic arguments favor this interpretation. However, its position so close to Numbers 21:17, the similar references to water (well, river), and the further consideration that almost the entire book of Numbers contemplates the question of leadership authority, are factors that speak in favor of <sup>°</sup>Ali as a proper name in this text also.

Deuteronomy 17:14 also deserves attention. The Authorised Version has this as When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me... The significant phrase is “a king over me” or <sup>°</sup>Ali melek. If <sup>°</sup>Ali were an epithet (exalted), it should come after the word “king” rather than before it. As it stands, it could be translated “I will set <sup>°</sup>Ali king like all the peoples that are around me.”

This implies that the personage of <sup>°</sup>Ali is king of all the peoples around. The Authorised Version also has hermeneutical problems. The actual narrative relative to the establishment of kingship in Israel is found in 1 Samuel, and is clearly ill-advised. It requires the establishment of the unacceptable monarchy of Saul as a bridge to the acceptable dynasty of David (as). The critical study of Deuteronomy would date it as a later text, in which case there would be no problem. As it stands, the acceptability (with reservations) of the monarchy in Deuteronomy conflicts with the policy of Samuel. Probably the verse should stand as interpreted by the Authorised Version, whatever the hermeneutical problems may be.

In 1 Chronicles 28:19 there is an occurrence of the word that could well be translated as an epithet. The Authorised Version has this as All (this, said David,) the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. The relevant phrase is “miyyadh YHWH <sup>°</sup>Ali.” The translator has rearranged the words in translation probably because he does not, on the basis of philological reasons, accept the possibility of understanding <sup>°</sup>Ali as an epithet. A Qur’anic translator would have thought of this alternative first and perhaps have ignored the other altogether, but would at the same time lay himself open to charges of Arabicism. Many translators

have noticed the awkwardness of including “upon me” in the text, and have merely disregarded it, as does the American Standard Version: All this, (said David,) have I been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah, even all the works of this pattern. Others reinterpret it as a preposition with an elliptical object as does the Revised Standard Version All this he made clear by the writing from the hand of the LORD concerning it, all the work to be done according to the plan. In the latter <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali is translated with some imagination as “concerning it.”

The more straightforward translation would be “The whole in writing from the hand of YHWH <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali made clear...” This could be understood as “He made clear the whole in writing by the hand of YHWH <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali.” The interpretation “<sup>ʿ</sup>Ali made clear the whole in writing by the hand of YHWH” ignores Hebrew syntax. <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali must therefore refer to God in this text. The concrete meanings of the words should probably give way to their more abstract meanings, thus “The whole by decree from the authority of YHWH <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali made clear...” If this is an acceptable interpretation, it would provide a Hebrew precedent for the use of the word as an epithet, the exalted, as in Arabic.

A strange syntactical configuration is one found in Nehemiah 5:7. The Authorised Version has this as Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. The relevant phrase is “with myself” which seems to translate libbi <sup>ʿ</sup>ali. The full phrase is “my heart reigned <sup>ʿ</sup>ali. The word is syntactically in the position of a prepositional phrase. This is the only occurrence of the expression in the Scriptures, and it may well not mean “I consulted with myself.” It would seem more likely to suggest that his heart, the seat of his cogitations, reigned over him, thus influencing him to act as follows. In any case no reference to a proper name can be inferred.

Much of the Book of Job is ambiguous, but the word <sup>ʿ</sup>ali appears in such a context only once, in Job 29:7. The Authorised Version has it When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street! No translators seem to see real alternatives to this interpretation. Several Spanish translations disregard the prepositional meaning and read “judicial” or something similar for <sup>ʿ</sup>ali. Another adjectival alternative might be “leafy,” but neither of these is relevant to the proper name Ali.

Psalm 7:8(9) has an interesting case. The Authorized Version renders this The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity (that is) in me. There is no reason whatsoever to add “that is” to the text. The final word is just as clearly a vocative as is the word YHWH at the pausal midpoint of the verse. The two words parallel each other. In this case the word Ali most readily relates to God, and is thus possibly a second precedent for the epithet. On the other hand, there is no reason to prohibit addressing a human figure in the second clause, that is, appealing to Ali as judge.

An interesting expression appears in Psalm 42:6(7). This is rendered in the Authorised Version as O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. The relevant phrase is ʿali nafshi. There are several cases when the preposition occurs before a noun with the same suffix, and these are merely circumlocutions expressing possession. The same structure appears here. However, it appears ambiguously, since ʿali appears between Elohay and nafshi, and could stand as easily with one as the other. The expression could be interpreted as “my God exalted.” In this case ʿali would be an epithet referring to God, either as a proper name or as an attribute, but again an Arabicism unrecognized by Biblical scholars.

Another case of possible reference to God may be seen in Psalm 56:12(13). The Authorised Version gives Thy vows (are) upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. A more straightforward interpretation would render both words at the beginning as vocatives, thus ʿAli Elohim. This interpretation would require the third word, “thy vows,” to go with the rest of the sentence. The midpoint pausal does not exclude that possibility. The translation would then read “O exalted God, (by) thy vows will I render praises unto thee.” Again, this would require the acceptance of an Arabicism.

Psalm 57:2(3) presents another possibility of a vocative parallel. The Authorised Version gives I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth (all things) for me. Here again the Qur’anic translator would immediately see two parallel epithets after the word El. Many verses of the Qur’an terminate in precisely this way. Thus we should read “I will cry unto God most high; unto God Accomplisher, Exalted.” This is especially interesting, since it uses the expanded word from the same root as Ali, ʿelyon. This form of the word Ali is the one generally used in Hebrew in reference to God.

Psalm 86:13 is ambiguous, and could be translated in either of two ways. The Authorized Version gives For great (is) thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. The alternative would be “For great (is) thy mercy, O ʿAli...” In this case the name again would refer again to God.

There is a final verse in Ezekiel 3:14 where the word could just as well be translated as an epithet of God. The Authorised Version gives So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. The alternative translation would be “...the hand of the LORD exalted was strong.”

The texts examined may be placed in several groups. The first includes cases of ambiguity which do not contribute toward finding the word ʿAli used as a proper name or epithet. The second includes cases of ambiguity in which the word ʿAli could just as well be translated as a proper name or epithet, but in which cases the translators have never chosen to do so. The third group includes cases of ambiguity in which the word ʿAli could best be translated as a proper name or epithet, but in which cases the translators have sought awkward alternatives, often adding words not found in the original.

The texts remain troublesome. There are texts that can clearly best be translated as referring to a proper name or epithet. These suggest that others, ambiguous ones, might also best be interpreted in this way. As we examine these to determine whether the name Ali (or the Hebrew segholate form Eli) is meant, we see that some of these, if they are interpreted as epithets or proper nouns, must refer to God. In that case, an Arabicism produces a parallel term to the common Hebrew term Elyon.

Nevertheless, there are two considerations to note. The first is that several of the ambiguous names, notably those in the Torah, associate the name ʿAli with a source of water. This brings to mind Qurʾanic associations, specifically the pool of Kauthar and the role given to ʿAli (as) in that regard. While it is not possible to state that the word ʿAli in the Hebrew Scriptures is used in a prophetic sense in regard to ʿAli (as), there are passages that seem to be evocative of that. They are ambiguous, and perhaps refer to God, but the possibility remains that they are faint intimations, or perhaps more than faint intimations of a promised figure to come.

The second consideration is that non-Muslim Biblical scholars have not taken note of the fact that the epithet ʿAli as applied to God in



the Qur'an has striking parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures, not only in the Psalms but in several other passages. This failure is only to be expected, since it requires the acceptance of an Arabicism. The positive result of this study is to show that the Hebrew Scriptures and the holy Qur'an are perhaps closer to each other in expression than has generally been acknowledged. In any case, either the acceptance of the term as meaning "exalted" on one hand, or as a proper name on the other, seems to be the best way of accommodating those texts of Scripture that until now have been glossed over with translations having little or no meaning. Either solution brings the Bible closer into accord with Islam.

## Lecture Ten: Ghadeer in the Bible

The word ghadeer in the Bible appears as the Hebrew word for wall or fence. As such, it is generally proper to translate it. However, the wall or fence is often used in a most suggestive and even clearly symbolic way, and with only three or four exceptions seems highly significant to the events known to have taken place at Al-Ghadeer in Islamic tradition.

The first occurrence of the word is in the story of Balaam, the ancient Persian prophet, in Numbers 22. This prophet was asked to curse the people of God, and instead of refusing to do so, he inquired of God whether he might do so or not, hoping that God would give him permission to take the reward offered for doing so. He set out against God's command, at which point Numbers 22:24 says "the angel of YHWH stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall (ghadeer) on this side, and a wall (ghadeer) on that side." Balaam did not see the angel, but his donkey, in seeking to turn aside, crushed his foot against the wall. Since that occasion, ghadeer has been a symbol of the wall by which God reveals the right way, and the wall against which those who choose not to be rightly guided bruise their ankles. Another text using the word as a fence or wall to show the right path is Job 19:8.

The word is used again in reference to the descendants of Simeon, who destroyed the last of the Amelekites at the command of God. It says in 1 Chronicles 4:39,40 that "they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks. 40 And they found fat pasture and good, and the land was wide, and quiet, and peaceable; for they of Ham had dwelt there of old." The Massoretic scribes have arbitrarily vocalized the word as Ghedor, but the word in the original text is precisely the same as that of Numbers 22. This passage suggests a further symbolism for the word Ghadeer. It is an unexpected source of well-being and felicity. Pasture for the flocks is already well-known in the Hebrew Scriptures in connection with divine guidance, as seen in the famous Psalm 23.

The word Ghadeer is vocalized as such in Ezra 9:9. "For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give

us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.” The building of a wall in this text has its literal sense, but the expressions, especially here, are heavily weighted with symbolism. This is intimated by the use of the expression “to give.” The literal wall of Jerusalem was build with human hands, but the ghadeer itself was something given by God. What was given was a re-establishing of the center of faith and authority. It must be noted that the ghadeer in this situation was contested by the Samaritans. From an Islamic point of view, although in some aspects there is more in common with Samaritanism than Judaism, this ghadeer appears to be correct and justified. The Samaritans did not accept some of the prophets mentioned in the Qur’an, whom the Jews of the time did accept. It was this ghadeer in Jerusalem and Judah that differentiated between the divinely established authority and the unacceptable authority of the Samaritans. There is thus a perfect parallel between the ghadeer of Ezra and that known from Islamic tradition. This text also mentions the Persian connection already noted in Numbers 22.

There are two prophetic passages of import in regard to the word ghadeer. The first is in the context of fasting in Isaiah 58:12. The relevant expression is “repairer of the breach.” The word is pointed as godeer, that is, a participle, thus meaning “the one who is fencing up the breach.” It might just as well be a construct of ghadeer, thus meaning “the fencing up of the breach.” In any case, it refers to a human figure. Up to verse five, the prophet’s words apply to the people, who fail to serve God properly by fulfilling the forms of fasting but continue to act unjustly. The pronoun “you” changes to the singular in verse 7, after which the human figure of the ghadeer is described. These words apply most specifically to Imam Ali (as), who was appointed at Al-Ghadeer.

Isaiah 58:7 “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light

rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: 11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.”

The many expressions of this passage all fit the character and actions of Imam Ali very well. There are many narrations referring to the Imam (as) feeding the hungry. He also functioned to lift the burdens of the people, and dispelling backbiting and falsehood. But the text emphasizes the direct divine guidance that was given to the Imam.

The two passages in Ezekiel give quite a different message. They focus on the failure of Israel to fulfill their God-given role of leadership in propagating monotheism in the world. Ezekiel 13:5 “Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD.” This brings up the context of the need for the proclamation of Al-Ghadeer. Both Jews and Christians eventually failed to carry out the divine mandate. Therefore it was necessary to correct their failures through the revelation of the Qur’an, and the establishment of a “fence” or ghadeer to preserve divine law for the world. The text notes that the house of Israel will have to answer for the failure in the day of judgement.

This failure is even more clearly pinpointed in Ezekiel 22:30 “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.” The Imamate comes into its own specifically with Imam Ali at the proclamation of Al-Ghadeer.

Psalm 62 is one of the Imamic Psalms, having twelve verses. The word ghadeer appears in the third verse, the one in any series of twelve usually evoking the experiences of Imam Husseyn (as). The entire Psalm deals with the issue of divine authority. But verse 3 touches on the question of accepting, or in this case, not accepting the man established by God to represent His authority on earth. Psalm 62:3(4) “How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.” Here ghadeer is translated as “fence.” The word “ish” or “man” as used in the Psalms often has Imamic implications, as is clearly seen in Psalm 1:1. The implication is that those who should imagine mischief

against “a man” or the Imam and who should kill him, will in the same way also be slain themselves. The Imam is equated directly here with the ghadeer or fence that indicates the right path.

This warning against those who break the covenant of ghadeer is repeated in Ecclesiastes 10:8 ”He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” The prophet promises that whoever breaks ghadeer will be bitten by a serpent. The preceding reference to a pit of course primarily means the setting of a trap for another. However, the whole verse has an eschatological tone, suggesting either punishment in the grave for failure to recognize the Imam or punishment in the judgement.

## Lecture Eleven: Hussein (as) and Psalm

### 74

The Hebrew cognate to the word Hussein, Hoosen is found in Exodus 25:7; 28:4,15,22,23,24,26,28,29,30; 29:5; 35:9,27; 39:8,9,15,16,17,19,21; and Leviticus 8:8. In every case it refers to the article of clothing worn by the ministering high priest on his chest, and containing twelve stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes and the Urim and Thummim, oracular stones used to ascertain the divine will. No other word is used in the Hebrew Scriptures from the same root at all. The word is therefore quite different from Hamda and Ali, the former of which appears clearly as the name of an awaited prophet in Hebrew Scripture, and the latter of which can also best be translated as sometimes referring to a divinely appointed human figure.

The use of the word to refer to a symbol of the priest's bearing the names of the people before God is of course tempting. The feelings it may evoke in relationship to the grandson of the prophet, the Imam Hussein (as), are deep, but hardly convincing to the researcher or skeptic.

One must admit the total lack of linguistic evidence for the names Hasan and Hussein (both of the same root) in the Hebrew Scriptures. Furthermore, the many references that speak to the Muslim mind about Hussein (as) are already co-opted by Christians in reference to Jesus (as), or by Jews in reference to the awaited Messiah (as). Among these are the famous Isaiah 53 so often used by Christians as a prophecy of the crucifixion, but which seems so clearly to parallel the experiences of the martyred Hussein (as).

There are other texts, less often noted by non-Muslims, that by their content lend themselves to application to the Imam (as). Among the best-known of these is Jeremiah 46:6,10. "Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates.... For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a

sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.” The implication, from the Islamic point of view, is that this is a promise that God will avenge the attack on His beloved Hussein (as) and his companions at Karbela, on the Euphrates River. Despite the striking parallel of such passages to the events, there are many barriers to their acceptance as evidence of Biblical support for Islam. The liberal denial of prophecy altogether aside, the psychological resistance to such an interpretation is prodigious.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibilities of more objective evidence. The weakness of linguistic evidence does not mitigate structural evidence. Obviously structural evidence in itself is insufficient, but it provides a schema that greatly strengthens the objectivity of the evidence of content and context. What must be examined is the many series of twelve that exist in the Bible for evidence of characteristics for each of the twelve slots in the series, and whether or not those characteristics parallel those of the twelve Shi'ite Imams (as) and correspondingly of Imam Hussein (as) in particular. These series are specifically the twelve reigning patriarchs of the Book of Genesis, the twelve sons of Ishmael (as), the twelve sons of Jacob (as), the twelve judges of the Book of Judges, the twelve righteous kings of Judah, and the twelve apostles of Jesus (as). Aside from series of human figures, there are many series of twelve to be found in the Bible. Among these are passages containing twelve sections, and passages containing twelve references to a particular word. The former type is particularly fruitful. There are a number of such passages in the Book of Psalms, including many Psalms of twelve verses each, and most notably the series of twelve Psalms entitled Psalms of Asaph. A careful comparison of the twelve Psalms of Asaph to the names of the twelve sons of Ishmael, which give the clues to the characteristics of each of the twelve slots, shows that these Psalms reflect the character of each of the twelve Imams.

We shall focus specifically on Psalm 74, which is, within this schema, prophetic of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as). It is the third of the Psalms of Asaph.

1 Maschil of Asaph. O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever?  
why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?

The maschil is a didactic Psalm, one for instruction. The instruction is not necessarily in the wisdom genre, nor even law. It can be instruction in prophecy in the sense of future events. The content of

this Psalm appears strange as a subject of instruction, since it is couched in words of appeal to God to intervene in a difficult situation. In fact, this appeal to intervene is the anguish the Psalmist feels as he contemplates the future event about which he is instructing.

The word Asaph means a convener or collector, and is probably a title conferred on the one who convened the liturgical choir established by David (as), noted in 1 Chronicles 6:39. This may have been taken as a personal name, or one having been born to the post may have been given a name appropriate to his activity.

As the prophet contemplates the tragedy of Karbela, he exclaims these words in anguish. It is possible that David (as) wrote this Psalm, although many researchers suggest that it was written by Asaph. It is also possible that David (as) was an ancestor of Imam Hussein (as) through a marriage contracted when he was a refugee among the Arab Kedarites, from whom the prophet Muhammad (as) is descended. Whether or not the prophet sees Imam Hussein (as) as a son, his anguish is similar to that of those who are horrified in all generations by the suffering he went through. The Hebrew expression does not imply that God is the originator of the tragedy or that it is a punishment. Such expressions in Hebrew merely refer to God's sovereignty as a basis for making an appeal for help.

2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

Verses 2 and 3 begin by giving a pre-Islamic context. The appeal is for God, at the event of Karbela, to remember the great things He did in ancient times to save His faithful people. The text, being didactic, uses the supplication language to insist on the need for divine deliverance. The rod of inheritance suggests that Imam Hussein (as) is descended from David (as). Redemption does not imply saving from sin, but that the person involved is especially beloved by God. The reference to Mount Zion is probably specific, although the word itself could refer to any fortress. However, it is more likely that we should see here the idea that the place of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein thereby gains the same sanctity, at least in some sense, as the house of God, which at the time of David was Quds or Jerusalem.

3 Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.



The expression “lift you your feet” is again an appeal to save, but as a didactic Psalm its main import is to describe the situation as hopeless without divine intervention. The expression “perpetual desolations” aptly describes the tragedy of Karbela. The Psalmist draws the divine attention to what the enemy has done to the “holy ones,” and by so doing draws the attention of the listener as well.

4 Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.

Verse four refers to the great tumult of enemies brought against the congregation of Hussein (as). It mentions the ensigns or banners that they raised against him.

5 A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.

6 But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers.

Verses five and six refer graphically to the mutilation of the bodies at Karbela. It uses a continuation of the temple figures of the preceding verses. It is not unknown to compare people to trees, especially wooden embellishments in the temple. The sanctuary or temple or house of God is made up of the “people of the house.” By defacing the people of the house, the enemy was effectively carving up the house of God itself.

7 They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.

Verse seven is a graphic description of the vandalizing of the camp of Hussein (as).

8 They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.

Verse eight is a prophecy of the fact that the enemies of the Imam (as) had firmly decided to destroy him and his companions altogether. The prophecy continues by saying that in so doing they had effectively, from their own point of view, destroyed every place of prayer on earth. This is an extension of the figures in verse six.

9 We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.

Verse ten is a lament referring to three aspects of Karbela. At that point the banners of the Imam (as) were not to be seen flying. Secondly, there was no prophet. Thirdly, there was none among us “that knoweth how long.” That is, the man of knowledge, the Imam, had been martyred. The verse begins with the fact that the colors were not flying, and mournfully goes on to the fact that the prophet (as) was no longer. Furthermore, the last living one of the holy house that the prophet had gathered under his mantle was dead. There was no longer anyone to know how long.

10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

Verses ten and eleven refer to the condition of enemy dominance over the imamate. This began effectively with the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as) and will end at the return of the Mahdi (as). The condition is one of blasphemy. Usurper rule is blasphemous, since no matter what position a ruler takes on the matter of the oneness of God, if he takes power for himself without divine authority, his action is blasphemous. This is the condition of all rulership that does not acknowledge the imamate.

11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.

Verse eleven uses rhetorical question and an imperative appeal to continue the prophecy in this didactic Psalm. There are two possible implications in this context. For God to pluck His hand out of His bosom means the rectification of what happened in Karbela. It may refer only to the return of the Mahdi. On the other hand, it could well refer to the resurrection and reappearance of Imam Hussein.